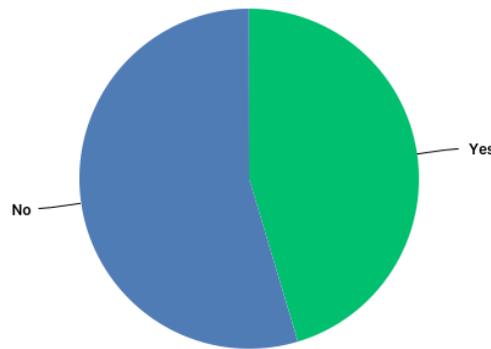


## Fear & Uncertainty Reign -- With a Dash of Hopeful Optimism

### New AEC Industry Poll on COVID-19 Impacts

A poll of America's AEC community, conducted by the [Design-Build Institute of America](#) from March 20-24<sup>th</sup>, provides a glimpse into an industry grappling with a constantly changing COVID-19 environment and the stress of often dueling demands. Poll results show nearly half (45%) of design-build teams had already halted or delayed work on projects with 50% reporting staffing disruptions in the first weeks of the pandemic response.

Q7 Have you halted or delayed work on any active or future projects due to the pandemic?



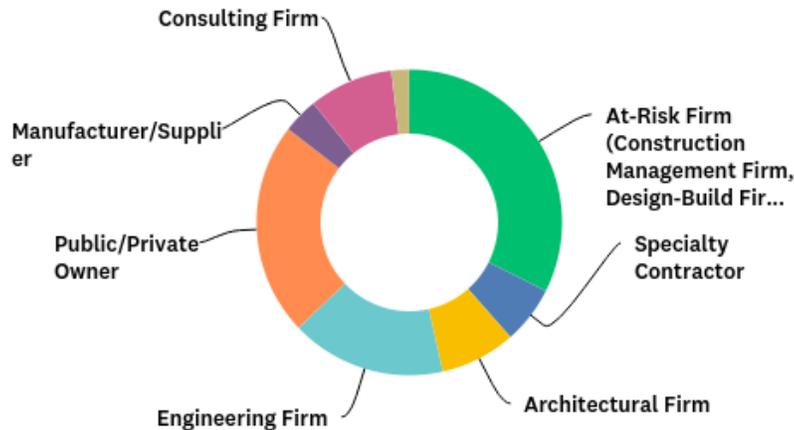
The answers provided by 309 respondents, while not scientific, show the balancing act of keeping personnel safe while meeting project expectations and fulfilling performance requirements in a constantly changing crisis environment. It's important to note that this poll provides a snapshot in time. It was taken before the most recent stimulus package was approved by Congress and, for many, the environment changes with each passing day.

In some ways, reactions to the current and future threats facing designers, builders, suppliers and Owners read like an apocalyptic thriller. Fear of death and illness, unease about the safety and security of their families and communities, a growing number of shuttered job sites and social isolation. Even so, many remain hopeful our nation can come through this pandemic with important lessons learned for the future.

America's design-build teams represent every discipline in the AEC industry including, architects, engineers, builders, subcontractors, suppliers, manufacturers, Owners and more. Respondents to the DBIA COVID-19 survey were as diverse as design-build teams.



Q16 Please describe your organization here.



## Staffing Disruptions

The vast majority surveyed are utilizing telework (98%) with far fewer imposing layoffs or furloughs (11%) or extended leave policies (10%). Fifty percent reported personnel disruptions at the time of polling, although many commented that the situation is changing rapidly.

*"We are short staffed and with social distancing and mid-term financial uncertainty in place it has disrupted our ability to interview and recruit additional staff resources."*

*"We recently laid off 25% of staff. More to come possibly."*

*"We're beginning to see client delay and deferral of project decisions- however hard yet to determine if it's a short-term distraction as clients focus on business continuity or longer-term pipeline impact."*

*"The type of work I do cannot all be done remotely. My office may not need me anymore and may eliminate my position."*

*"The biggest challenge is survival. How long it is going to last and how do we get the workforce to be sustained through and after this pandemic?"*

Not only has the pandemic impacted job security for team members, it's also significantly changed how team members perform their jobs. Respondents describe a



variety of approaches to meet the CDC's social distancing requirements with, not surprisingly, mixed results on job sites.

*"We have moved all meetings to outside the trailers, with staggering breaks so employees don't eat and drink closely together. We are working to keep employees 6' apart while working but this is very difficult for many tasks. We have tried to implement where possible, but it will never get to 100%."*

*"Work is still being accomplished, but with some reduction to productivity. The main interest is in worker health and safety."*

*"We've needed to rethink and reorganize overlapping trades, trying to limit multiple trades on a given floor."*

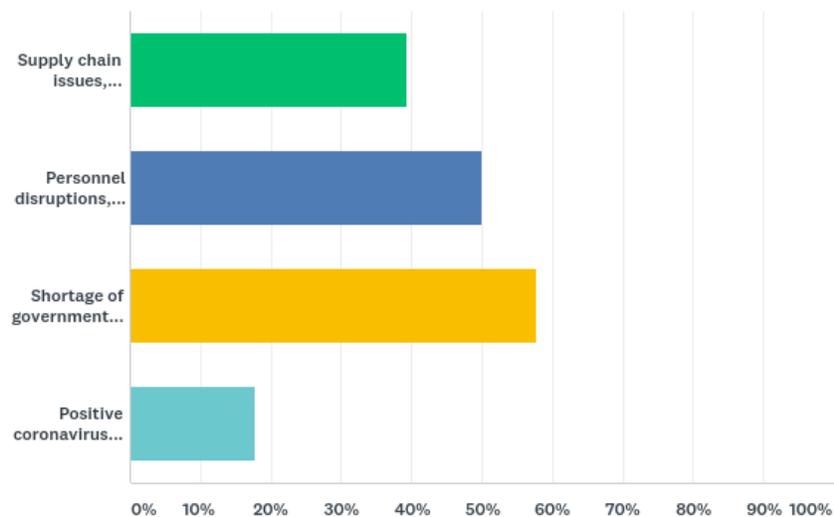
*"An industry already full of stressed people is becoming stressed about another crisis."*

*"It's the new normal."*

## Project Disruptions

In addition to the changed work environment for team members on job sites and off, there are other disruptions facing project managers. Key among them:

Q4 Have you experienced project disruptions due to any of the following?



*“There are few projects at bid and we’re not sure what is the best course of action ... move forward with them or delay after a clearer direction. It is fluid and flexible.”*

*“Only essential projects are moving forward. Housing and infrastructure are moving forward. However, with limitations on inspection services it is difficult to stay on schedule.”*

*“Keeping open communication with owner and design team is key here. We’ll ultimately still meet most end goals, it just may not be in the time desired originally.”*

Only 20% of those polled say “force majeure” has been claimed on a project, however, many predict that will increase over time.

## **Biggest Challenges**

Uncertainty and fear of the unknown impacting both health and financial futures were the most commonly expressed challenges facing respondents. The balancing act required to keep valued staff safe while also keeping companies solvent is weighing on the industry.

*“The biggest challenge is survival. How long it is going to last and how do we get the workforce to be sustained through and after this pandemic?”*

*“It’s the fear, with growing numbers of infected and sick workforce.”*

*“The lack of knowledge. We have never been through this before and everyone including our Government is making it up as we go along. Slow response from our governments (federal, state, and local) is our biggest threat.”*

*“The challenges are enormous. Disruption to workflow, potential deadly illness, fear and not being able to see the end of all this. Uncertainty is the biggest challenge at this point.”*

## **The Future**

These are uncertain times and it’s that uncertainty that has made industry’s response to this point so challenging to navigate. Even so, many of those polled are working to envision a future beyond this pandemic.

*“The current projects will face labor shortage and delayed completion. The future projects will be expensive.”*



*“Some of our projects will be sustained (ie: Healthcare, Education and Commercial (essential needs). Other projects (ie: retail, other commercial (non-essential needs) will be put on hold.”*

*“Priorities will shift at least temporarily but urgency will increase to keep critical infrastructure viable. Overall volume of work will likely drop short term and then increase.”*

*“We expect some level of slowdown as the mitigation measures linger. Once COVID-19 is on the wane, we expect work to pick up at an ever-increasing pace and look for Q3 & Q4 of 2020 to be very busy.”*

A small percentage (27%) anticipate new projects related to pandemic mitigation, emergency services, and capacity building.

*“Here in Washington State contractors are being asked to aid in helping with shelters and testing sites for state agencies to aid local hospitals etc.”*

*“We are currently positioning for increased building in certain sectors such as emergency shelters, water and highway transportation in 6 months.”*

*“Wastewater characteristics in collections system and at the plant are changing with increased ragging and potential for pump failure as the population flushes more “wipes” (toilet paper shortages). Inquiries are increasing dramatically.”*

*“Affordable housing is more important than ever. Clients wish to move forward quickly.”*

Poll respondents also noted there many lessons to be learned, even during the first weeks of the COVID-19 mitigation response.

*“This will provide a template for future responses to disruption.”*

*“This is a great test of our business continuity planning and IT resources. Some businesses/offices weren't prepared, and it is showing.”*

*“Implementing successful practices that we are using now instead of going back to the ‘old way’ just because it has always been done that way could provide improvements such as reduced congestion and reduced infrastructure costs.”*

*“Plan instead of panic. Grow thru the challenge versus ‘go’ thru it. Embrace and participate in our beloved construction community.”*



## Design-Build in Times of Crisis

In times of crisis, design-build delivers fast, efficient and cost-effective recovery to communities in need. From rebuilding the Pentagon after 9-11 to reconstruction after devastating hurricanes like Katrina, design-build has helped America recover and rebuild. Design-builders expect that same will be true again.

*“I foresee DB projects being the preferred and required delivery method to 1. get the necessary projects completed in a timely manner, 2. stimulate the economy and recover from our recession through federally funded highway and transit construction projects.”*

*“Long term, our economy will come roaring back and the DB community needs to be ready to respond.”*

*“The needs are there, the jobs can be created, design-build can deliver.”*

*“Design-build teams will play a huge role to make projects more efficient and make up for any time that has been lost due to the pandemic.”*

*“D-B has always been the quickest way to jump in and protect or enhance infrastructure in an emergency situation. This will be the same.”*

*“There is no better place to invest in the economy responsibly than provide Design-Builders the opportunity to rebuild the country. We have work to do.”*

A constantly changing environment plus a huge amount of uncertainty continue for our industry nationwide. In response to our communities shared anxiety and quest for answers, DBIA will host a series of free webinars on a variety of topics geared to the AEC industry navigating this difficult time. DBIA is committed to help our industry manage this crisis and prepare for the future. We DO have work to do.

Our first free webinar in the **Design-Builders: Managing the Present & Preparing for the Future** will be held **Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup> from 11:00-Noon**. Learn more and [register here](#).

