



South Carolina Insights Review

Published July 2021

Executive Summary

From July through August 2020, we spoke with state and local policymakers across South Carolina to understand how the government and private sector responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and what policymakers want to see from advocates during this time.

Policymakers identify reviving the economy, supporting education, and expanding internet access across the state as top policy priorities for South Carolina as it recovers from COVID-19. This Review summarizes our findings on the top issues that have emerged due to COVID-19, how the private sector has engaged with these issues, and strategies and examples for public-private sector partnership moving forward.



“I say this to my grandkids. You know, *it’s like you pushed a button, and your life is on pause.*”

-Councilmember, Municipal

This Review Examines Four Policy Priorities:



Reviving the Economy

- After the economic crash at the beginning of the pandemic, reviving the economy was a primary goal of policymakers. This meant setting clear public health guidelines, supporting local small businesses, and getting employees “back to work” safely.



Supporting Education

- The educational system in South Carolina continues to face long standing challenges, including a decentralized system for school funding, students missing instruction time, and school districts’ inability to provide necessary support services.



Expanding Internet Access

- Wide gaps in internet services became a major concern during the COVID-19 pandemic. Policymakers prioritize providing affordable and accessible statewide internet services to everyone.



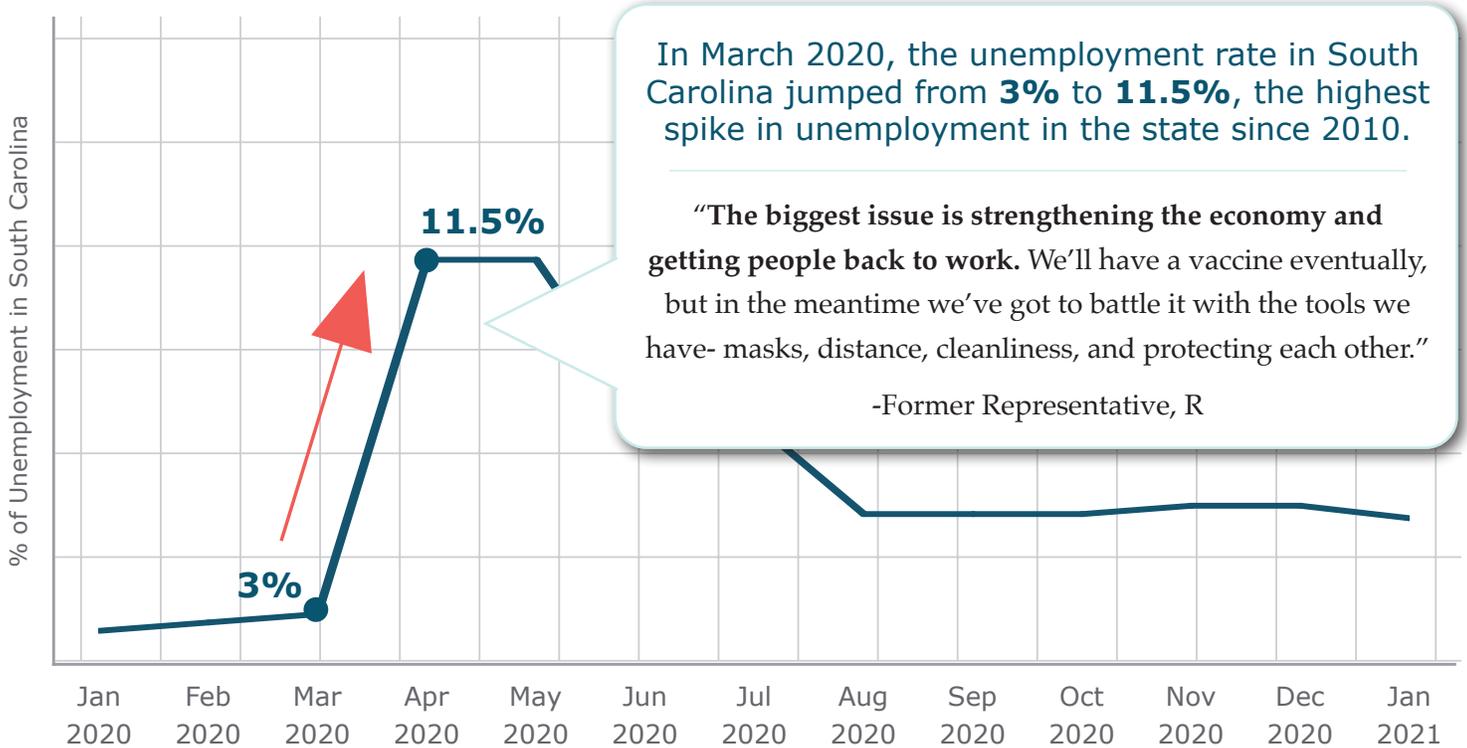
Public-Private Sector Partnership & Advocacy

- Strong public-private partnerships were essential to facilitating successful COVID-19 responses. Some of the best practices in South Carolina include active communication and commitment to the community.

Reviving the Economy

Reviving the Economy

South Carolina Experienced a Massive Spike in Unemployment as a Result of COVID-19¹



Shifting Health Guidelines Make it Harder for Businesses to Operate

“I do think we need to get the economy going again, but they need to make sure, when they do open up, to try to follow the guidelines as close as they can. Opening and closing the economy is causing serious problems for people.”

-Regional Coordinator, Executive Branch, R



Following Public Health Guidelines and Ensuring Worker Safety Remains a Priority

“From an economic standpoint, it’s harder for businesses than it used to be. **Businesses need to provide fair value to customers, but now they also need to help customers feel safe, otherwise, they won’t go out and spend money.** And many of them don’t have the resources to deliver or connect with customers online.”

-Staff, Department of Consumer Affairs, R

1. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate in South Carolina [SCUR], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

Supporting Education

Supporting Education

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many of the long-standing issues facing South Carolina's public school systems. Policymakers express concern that pandemic-related changes to schooling may negatively affect the educational outcomes of students.



Unequal Opportunities

"In South Carolina, you can get an excellent education, but only if you live in the right zip code. **The pandemic has really focused folks on one part of the problem: the need to deliver broadband statewide.** We have swaths of the state, including in my own county, that don't have internet service. That's a huge issue for remote learning."

-Policy Specialist, Executive Branch, I



Lost Instruction Time

"We can't even do standardized testing with these children because there's still so many of them at home. **In a rural state with terrible broadband service that creates huge problems in a lot of areas.** With remote learning, these kids are going to basically miss out on a year of school."

-Representative, R



Diminished Access to Services

"The problem is more than just educational. **Students were also getting emotional health counseling, meals during the day, and socialization with peers.** All that is gone now."

-Representative, R

Policymakers' Priorities for Education in South Carolina

Policymakers understand the urgency of reopening schools in person in a safe and sustainable way. Their priorities for education in South Carolina are:



Improving online and hybrid learning



Safely reopening in-person schools

"Most of the schools in my county are moving in a very careful manner. There are some schools open. The students are going one or two days, and then the other days they're going to be sitting at home and doing their work remotely. **They're moving as carefully as they possibly can without stopping the education process. The education process is so important. Young people need to be engaged and have something to do.**"

-Councilmember, Municipal

Expanding Internet and Broadband Access

Expanding Internet and Broadband Access

Policymakers Prioritize Providing Affordable and Accessible Statewide Internet Services

Digital technologies create remote working and learning opportunities for some families, but many South Carolinians lack equal access. Gaps in internet service and coverage are major issues during the pandemic, and policymakers are rushing to find effective solutions.

“The biggest issue is the lack of reliable internet access. That deficiency in infrastructure, especially in rural areas, has made COVID very isolating. Your ability to work from home or to educate from home without fiber is crippled.”

-Workforce Advisor, Executive Branch, I

“One of the few good things to come out of COVID is that people want to talk about broadband now. It’s been on everyone’s mind for a while, and now it’s front and center with everyone forced to stay home. **Now is the time to get something passed while there’s momentum.”**

-Representative, R

Expansion of Internet Service was a Major Policy Priority for all States Researched in 2020



- California
- New York
- Minnesota
- Pennsylvania
- South Carolina
- Ohio
- Texas
- Illinois
- Florida
- Alabama



Affordability

“With broadband, the biggest remaining question is do the companies have infrastructure to put it in place. And then, who pays for it? In my district, the minimum is \$50 a month. A lot of families can’t afford to put out \$50 a month to be able to access the internet when they have food, medical care, and rent on small salaries. Many of these folks make \$8 or \$9 an hour.”

-Senator, D



Access

“In my district, broadband is a serious problem. Many students trying to do virtual learning don’t have internet access. We are getting legislation together to allow those students to have greater internet access at home. We still need to increase broadband and fiber optic cables.”

-Representative, D

Public-Private Sector Partnership and Advocacy

Public-Private Sector Partnership and Advocacy

Policymakers Trust Companies That Show Goodwill and Bring Aid to Local Communities

“Companies that want to show goodwill should do good things for my constituents: pay top wages and get invested in the community. We really want to get to know who our partner is going to be. It’s not just a place to do business. It’s a place to grow and prosper, and if they show that, we will stand behind them, too.”

-Representative, R

“A great thing I’ve seen across all industries is companies being helpful during hardship... There’s been a willingness to work with customers on keeping their bills up to date and paid or working on a payment plan.”

-Outreach Coordinator,
Executive Branch, I

Pillars of Effective Engagement

Communication

- ✓ Ensure clear, concise communication
 - ✓ Maintain consistent availability and engagement
 - ✓ Form personal relationships with policymakers
-

“Outline the issue in a ‘one-pager.’ A 25-page white paper is too much to read. If you give me a one-pager, it’s so much easier to get it to the members because they are so busy.

Being available, giving answers on the fly and saying, ‘if you need more information, I’m here,’ is also helpful.”

-Staff, Legislature, R

Local Involvement

- ✓ Develop a strong local reputation
 - ✓ Prioritize the fair pay and treatment of workers
-

“Pay fair wages, get involved in the community, and prove to us what you’re going to do based on what you’ve done in other locations. If companies are in other states, we’ll do our due diligence and check them out. It’s much like a marriage; you don’t get married on the first day.”

-Representative, R

Policymakers Want Continued Partnership and Community Engagement From the Private Sector

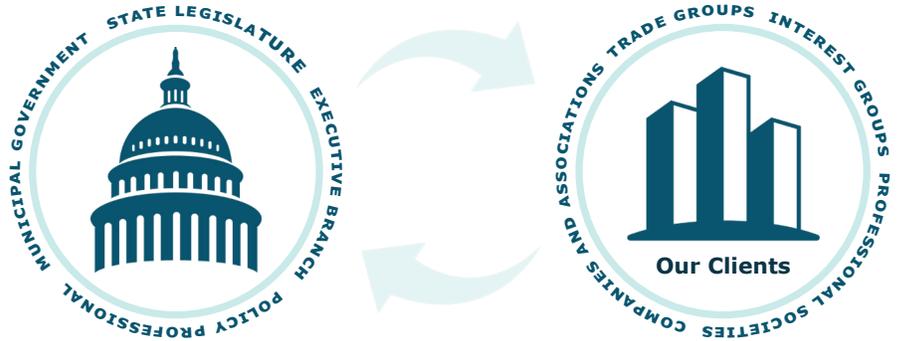
“Public-private partnerships are the only way we’re going to get through a lot of this, but the government tends to be a little afraid of that. A lobbyist will come and talk to you about a bill, and then you don’t find out until later that there were conflicts of interest problems. That’s where the government gets nervous; they can’t be weighing what’s in it for them with all the different conflicts going on.”

-Regional Workforce Advisor, Executive, I

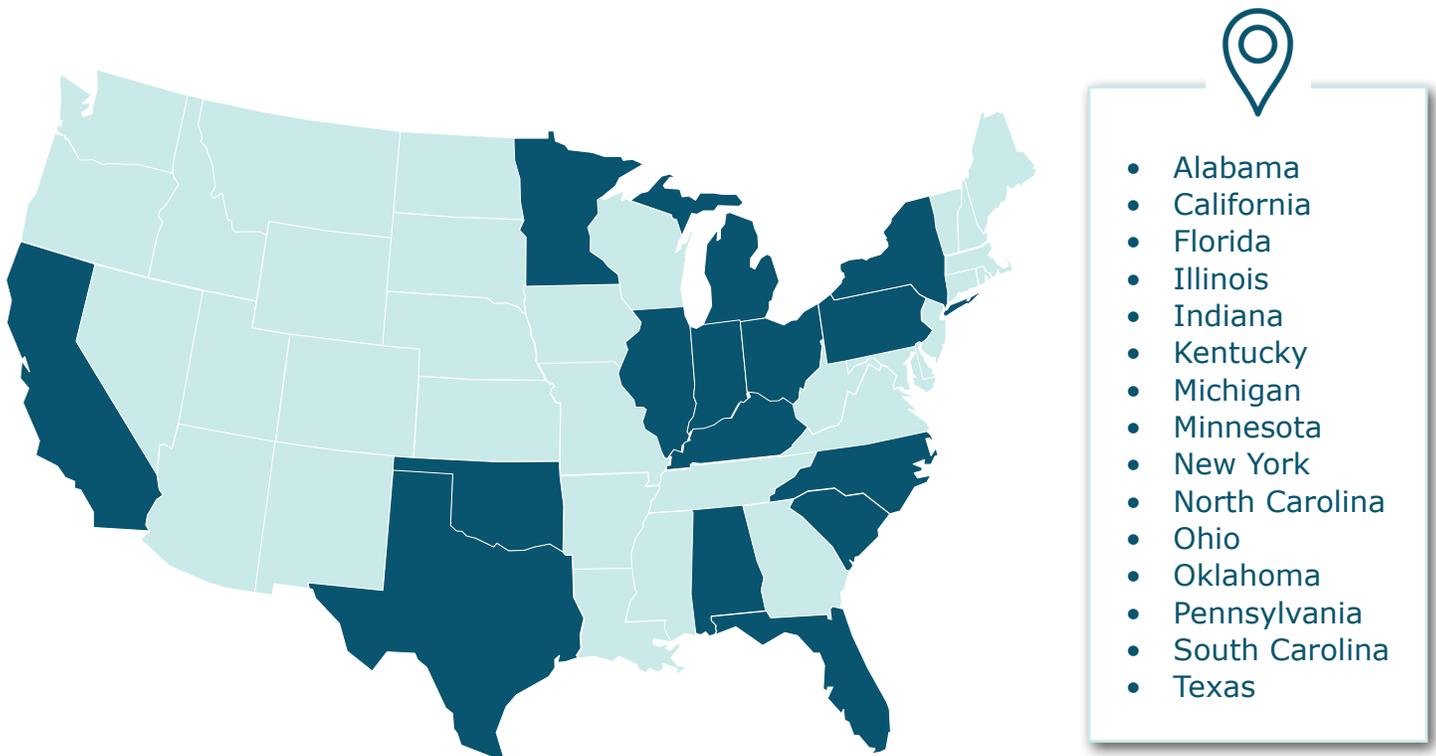
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States Insights Review

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