

# **Small Business Owner Perspectives on Succession Planning**

**Survey Findings** 

ideas42

March 2025

#### **About ideas42**



ideas 42 is a nonprofit that applies insights from behavioral science—the study of how people make decisions and act in the real world—to improve lives and drive social change. Working globally, we reinvent the practices of institutions, and create more effective products and policies that can be scaled for maximum impact.

We also teach others, ultimately striving for a future where the universal application of behavioral science powers a world with optimal health, equitable wealth, and environments and systems that are sustainable and just for all.

For the past 15 years, we've been at the forefront of applying behavioral science to create a more equitable world. And as we've developed our expertise, we've helped to define an entire field. Our efforts have so far extended to 50+ countries as we've partnered with hundreds of governments, foundations, NGOs, private sector entities, and philanthropic leaders.

Visit ideas42.org and follow @ideas42 on X [formerly Twitter] to learn more about our work. For more information about this report, contact Vivien Caetano at vcaetano@ideas42.org or explore our project webpage.

#### **Acknowledgments**

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The views and opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of JPMorganChase or its affiliates.

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# SURVEY SAMPLE

Our sample included 300 owners of U.S.-based employer businesses with \$1-16 million in revenue across three target industries: Retail Trade, Wholesale Trade, and Health Care. The survey was fielded from October 16 to November 11, 2024.

The following section provides more detail on demographic characteristics of our sample. Question numbers have been changed from the original survey for ease of reference throughout this report.

## 1

#### Are you the owner of a business?

(Count of respondents)

Response	Response Count
Yes	300
No	0

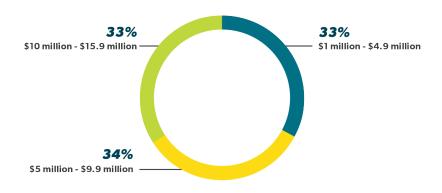


#### What was the business' estimated gross revenue in 2023?

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail

**Note:** We limited respondents to businesses with revenues between \$1-16 million, with an even split between the three revenue categories.



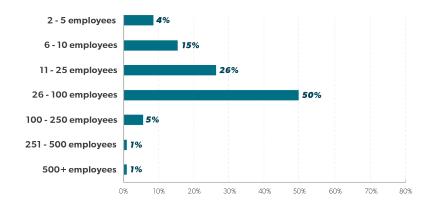
3

#### Including yourself, how many people does your business currently employ?

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail

**Note:** We limited respondents to businesses with 2+ employees, including the business owner.

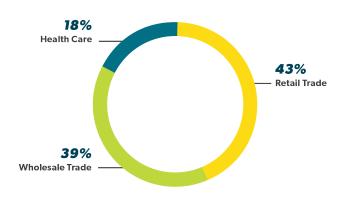




## Which of the following industries best describes your business?

(Percentage of respondents)

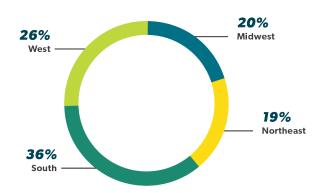
**Note:** We limited respondents to these three industries, based on criteria including proportion of older business owners and market share.



#### In which state is your business based?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by region)

**Note:** We set quotas for regions, so the sample was representative of U.S. business owners.



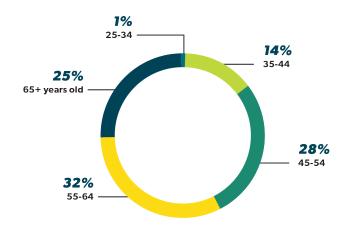
6

#### What is your age (in years)?

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail

**Note:** We set quotas for age, so the sample was representative of U.S. business owners with older business owners slightly oversampled.



## What is your gender? (Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** We did not set quotes for gender. Women were slightly oversampled and men were slightly undersampled.

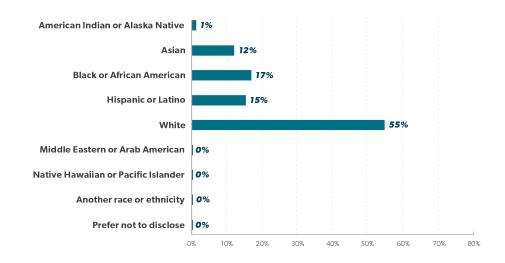


### 8

### Which races and/or ethnicities do you identify with? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents)

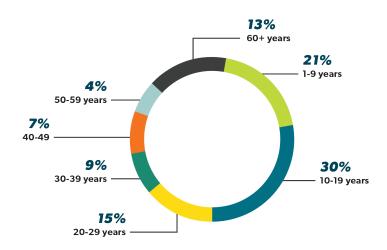
**Note:** We set quotas for race and ethnicity. White owners were undersampled, Black owners were oversampled, and other race and ethnicity groups were roughly representative of U.S. business owners.



9

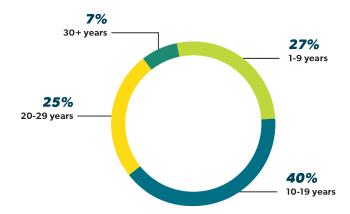
#### How many years has your business been in operation?

(Percentage of respondents)



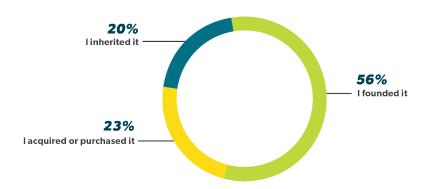
10

#### How many years have you owned your business?



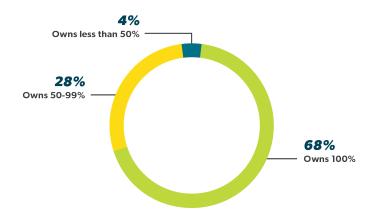
#### How did you become the owner of your business?

(Percentage of respondents)



## 12

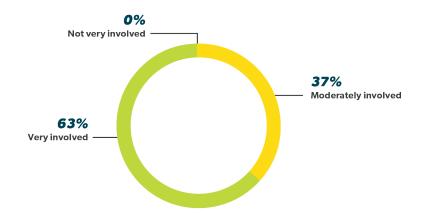
#### Are you the sole owner of the business?





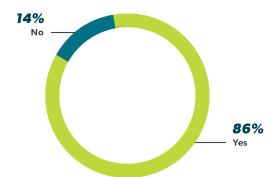
### How involved are you in the day-to-day operations of the business currently?

(Percentage of respondents)





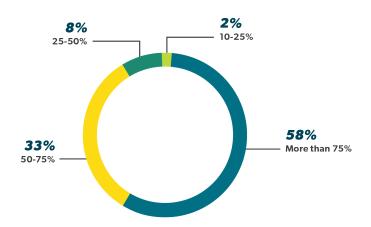
#### Was your business profitable in 2023?





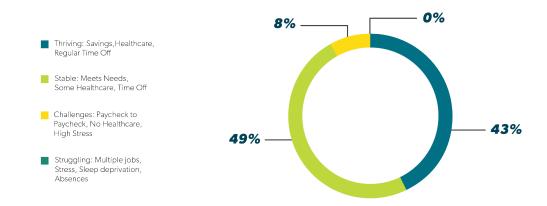
### What percentage of your household income is generated by this business?

(Percentage of respondents)



### 16

### Which best describes the financial health of the typical employee who works for your business?

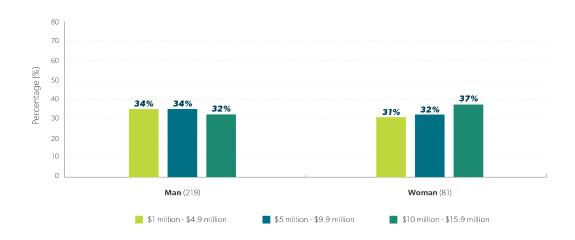


# SUBGROUP ANALYSIS

## 2A

#### What was the business' estimated gross revenue in 2023?

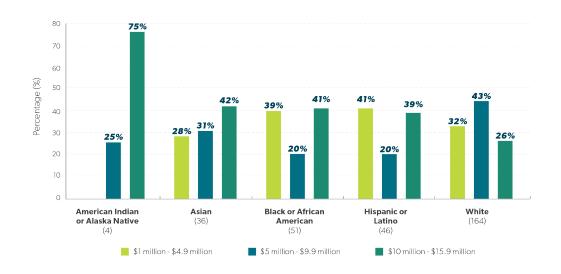
(Percentage of respondents, grouped by gender)



#### What was the business' estimated gross revenue in 2023?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by race and ethnicity)

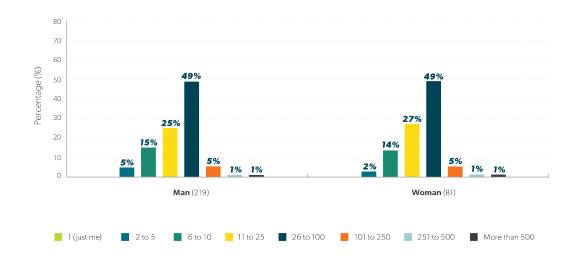
See Question 2



### **3A**

### Including yourself, how many people does your business currently employ?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by gender)

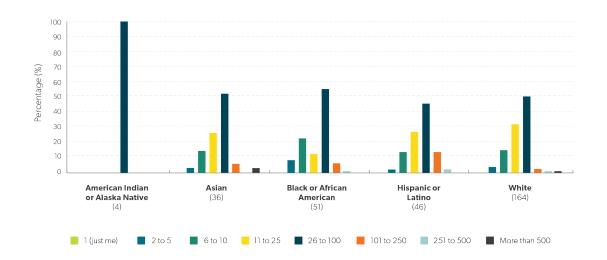


3B

### Including yourself, how many people does your business currently employ?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by race and ethnicity)

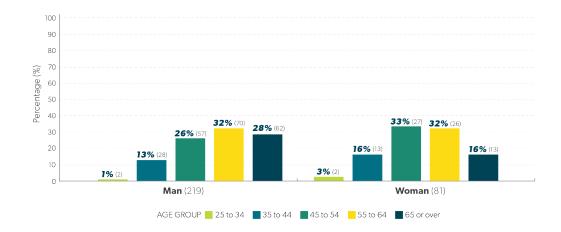
See Question 3



### 6A

#### What is your age (in years)?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by gender)



#### **SECTION 2**

#### **FINDINGS: PLANNING STATUS**

This section highlights trends in succession planning practices among business owners in our sample. Key takeaways include:

- Most report having a plan in mind, but many have not figured out the details:

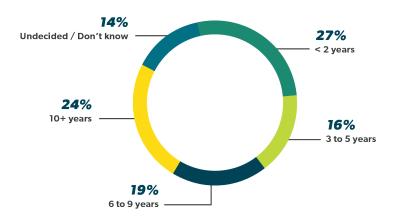
  About 50% of respondents report having a specific plan in place; 23% have a plan in mind but have not created a detailed/specific plan; and the remaining 27% have not decided on a plan.
- Age and planning timeline: Age and planning timelines are the most significant factors associated with planning status. Older business owners who are closer to exiting their businesses are more likely to have a plan in place.
- **Revenue trends:** Businesses with lower revenues are slightly less likely to have a concrete plan in place.

17

### When do you expect to exit your business (to retire, to pursue other opportunities, or for any other reason)?

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail

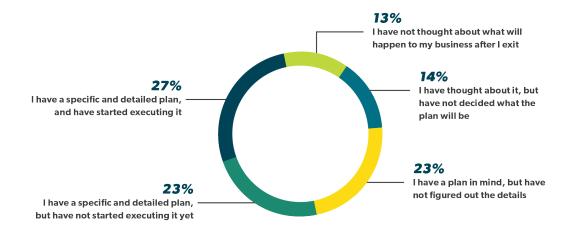


18

### To what extent have you made a plan for what will happen to your business after you exit?

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail



Throughout the remainder of the report, the full text of response options for Q18 have been shortened to the following abbreviated versions:

#### No Plan: Not Considered

I have not thought about what will happen to my business after I exit

#### No Plan: Undecided

I have thought about it, but have not decided what the plan will be

#### ▶ No Detailed Plan

I have a plan in mind, but have not figured out the details

#### ▶ Has Plan: No Execution

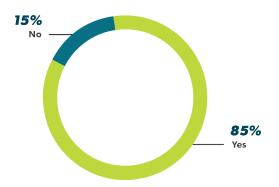
I have a specific and detailed plan, but have not started executing it yet

#### ▶ Has Plan: Started Executing

I have a specific and detailed plan, and have started executing it

## Is your plan documented in writing? (Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 150 respondents who reported having a succession plan in place (Q18).

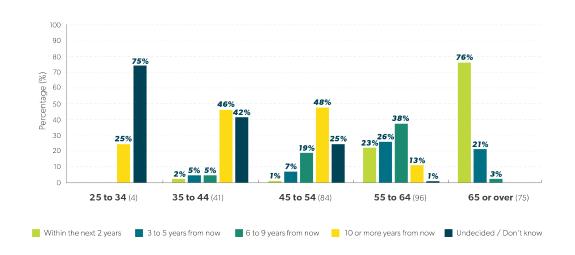


# SECTION 2A SUBGROUP ANALYSIS



## When do you expect to exit your business (to retire, to pursue other opportunities, or for any other reason)?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by age)

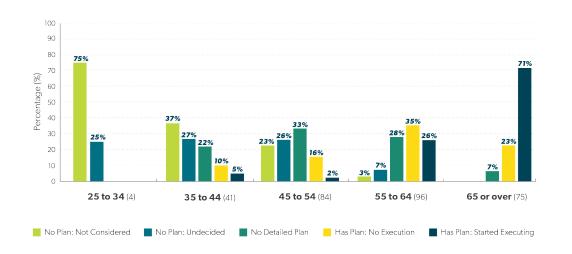




#### To what extent have you made a plan for what will happen to your business after you exit?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by age)

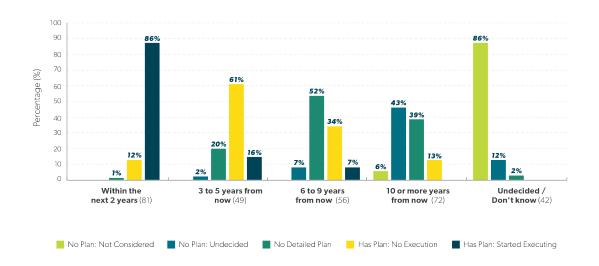
See Question 18



#### 18B

### To what extent have you made a plan for what will happen to your business after you exit?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by expected exit timing)

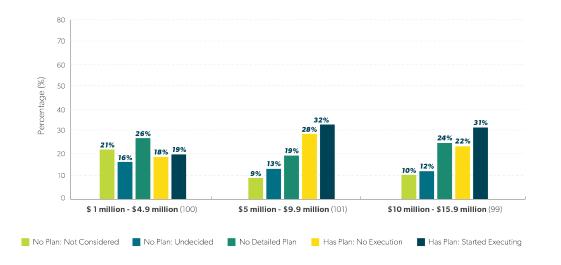




### To what extent have you made a plan for what will happen to your business after you exit?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by revenue)

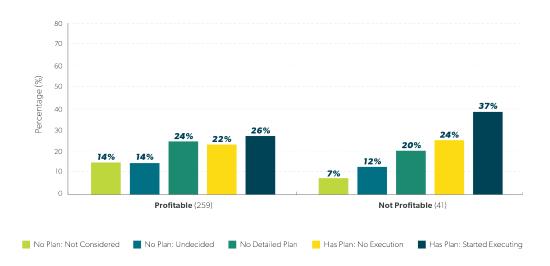
See Question 18



### 18D

#### To what extent have you made a plan for what will happen to your business after you exit?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by business profitability)

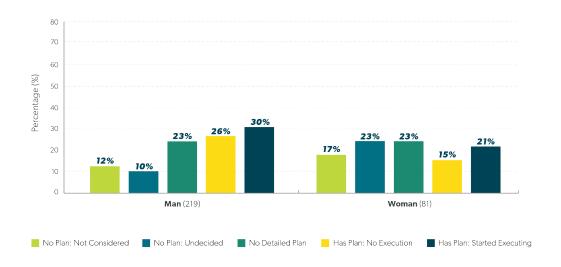




#### To what extent have you made a plan for what will happen to your business after you exit?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by gender)



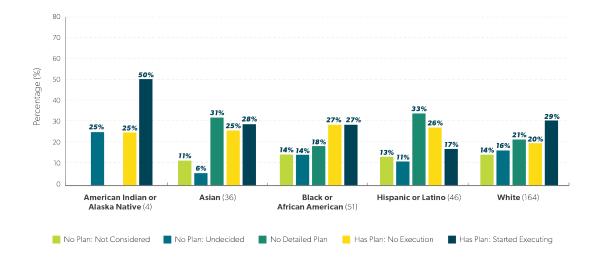


#### 18F

#### To what extent have you made a plan for what will happen to your business after you exit?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by race and ethnicity)

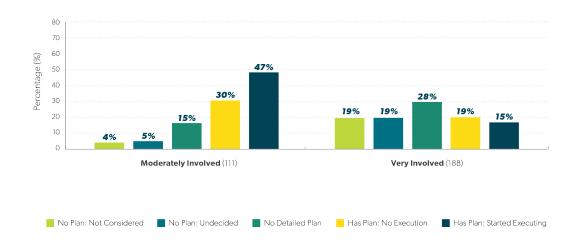






## To what extent have you made a plan for what will happen to your business after you exit?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by level of involvement in the business) See Question 18



#### **SECTION 3**

#### **FINDINGS: INFLUENCERS**

This section examines where business owners look for information or advice and how they are prompted to consider succession planning. Key takeaways include:

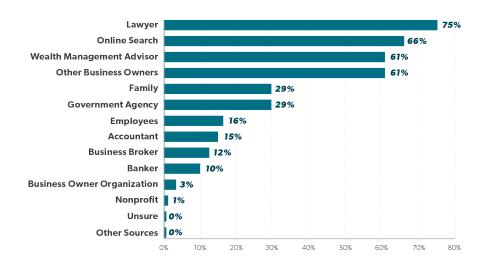
- **Key professional advisors:** Lawyers and wealth management advisors are common sources of information or advice about succession planning, are often the first to make business owners aware of succession planning, and are frequently involved in creating plans. Advisor encouragement is a top reason that business owners begin succession planning.
- **Other influencers:** Online searches, other business owners, family members, and government agencies are other common sources of information or advice about succession planning. Encouragement from family and seeing other business owners create succession plans are two common reasons owners begin planning. Family members and employees in leadership roles are often involved in creating plans.
- **No clear impact on planning practices:** There are no significant differences between business owners who have a plan and those who don't in terms of how they learn about succession planning. For example, hearing about planning through an online search isn't associated with being more or less likely to have a plan. Not knowing how the process works is not a commonly cited reason for not having a plan.



### How did you hear about succession planning? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 293 respondents who reported knowing succession planning is something businesses do (Q43).



21

# Please indicate anywhere you have already looked or you would look in the future for information or advice about succession planning. Select all that apply.

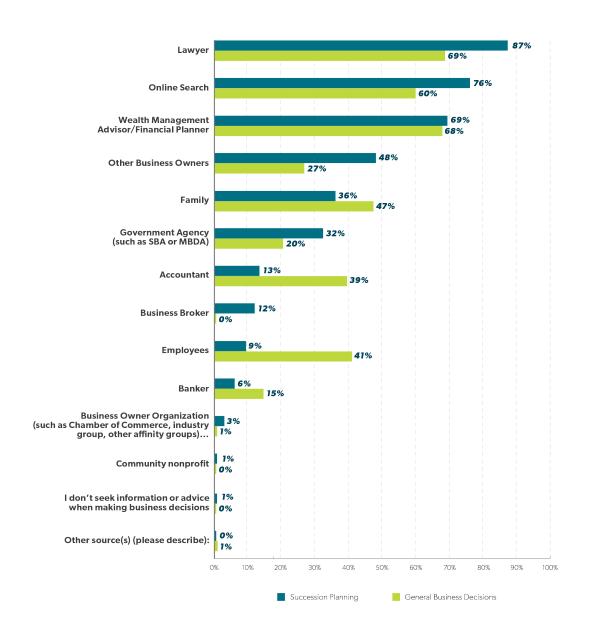
(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail





### Sources of Information or Advice: Succession Planning (Q21) vs. General Business Decisions (Q28)

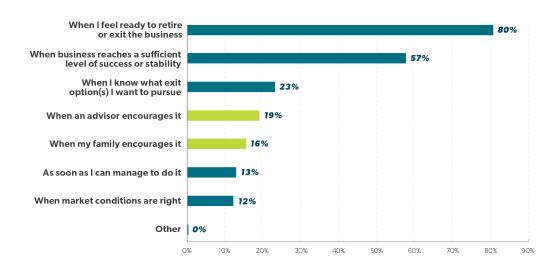




#### When do you think is the appropriate time to create a succession plan? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, with responses that indicate they were influenced by other actors highlighted)

**Note:** Question asked to 148 respondents who reported not having a succession plan in place (Q18) and either intended to or were undecided about whether to create a succession plan in the future (Q45).

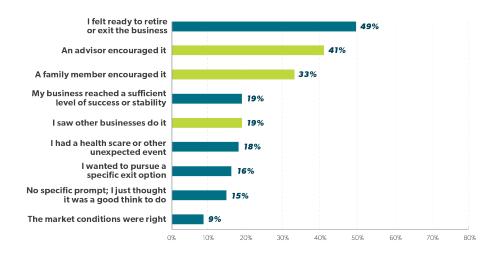


#### 23

### What prompted you to create a succession plan? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, with responses that indicate they were influenced by other actors highlighted)

**Note:** Question asked to 150 respondents who reported having a succession plan in place (Q18).

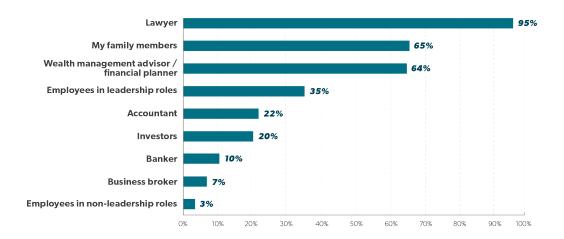




#### Who do you plan to involve in creating a succession plan for your business? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 143 respondents who reported not having a succession plan in place (Q18) and either intended to or were undecided about whether to create a succession plan in the future (Q45).

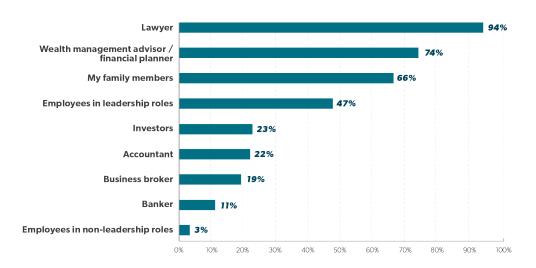


## 25

#### Who was involved in creating the plan? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 150 respondents who reported having a succession plan in place (Q18).

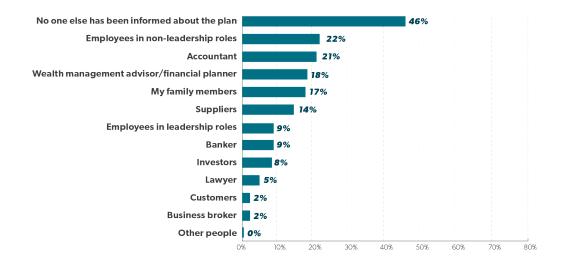




### Who else has been informed about the plan? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents)

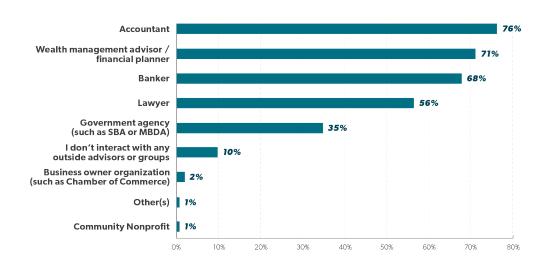
**Note:** Question asked to 150 respondents who reported having a succession plan in place (Q18). Responses are in addition to stakeholders reported to be involved in creating the plan (Q25).



### 27

### Which of the following do you interact with as part of your regular business operations? Select all that apply.



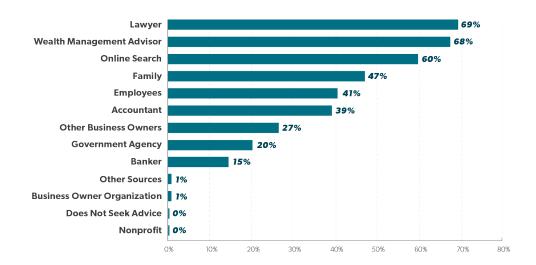




### Where do you turn for information or advice when making business decisions? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail



# SUBGROUP ANALYSIS

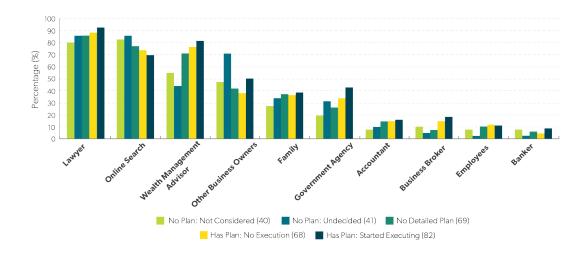


# Please indicate anywhere you have already looked or you would look in the future for information or advice about succession planning. Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by planning status)

See Question 21

**Note:** This graph does not include three response options that were selected by fewer than 10 respondents each.

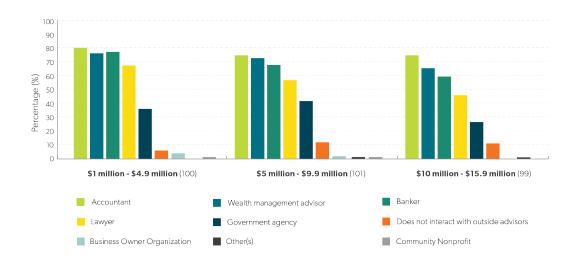




### Which of the following do you interact with as part of your regular business operations? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by revenue)

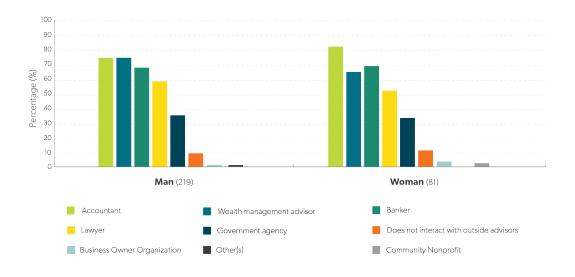
See Question 27



#### 27В

### Which of the following do you interact with as part of your regular business operations? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by gender)

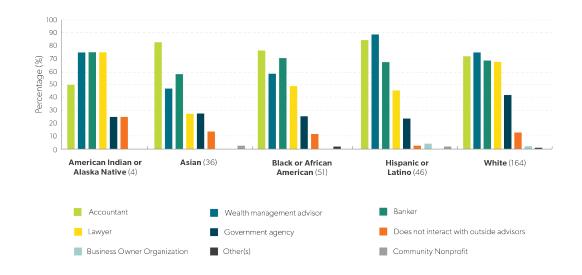




### Which of the following do you interact with as part of your regular business operations? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by race and ethnicity)

See Question 27



#### 27D

### Which of the following do you interact with as part of your regular business operations? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by number of employees)

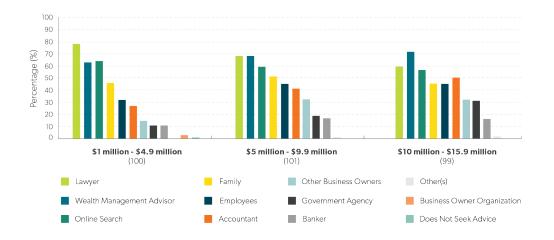




### Where do you turn for information or advice when making business decisions? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by revenue)

See Question 28



#### 28B

### Where do you turn for information or advice when making business decisions? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by gender)

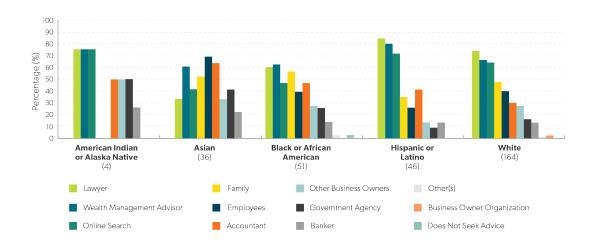




### Where do you turn for information or advice when making business decisions? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by race and ethnicity)

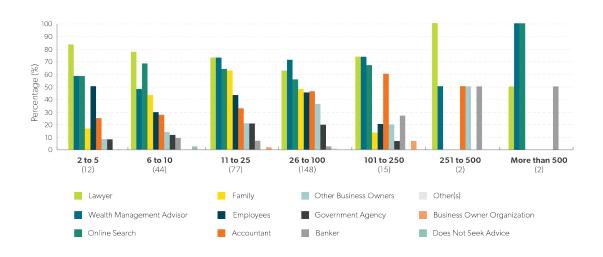
See Question 28



#### 28D

### Where do you turn for information or advice when making business decisions? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by number of employees)



#### **SECTION 4**

# FINDINGS: PRIORITIES AND MOTIVATIONS

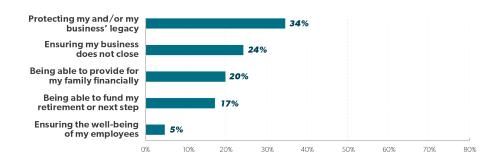
This section highlights the key priorities and motivations that drive business owners to create a succession plan. Key takeaways include:

- **Focus on legacy:** Business owners are most focused on protecting their business' legacy and ensuring it does not close, followed by financial concerns.
- **Trouble letting go:** Many business owners are emotionally attached to their businesses and worry about how their business will function without them. Fewer business owners express concern about having meaningful ways to spend their own time after they exit the business.



#### What is your highest-priority goal when thinking about succession planning?

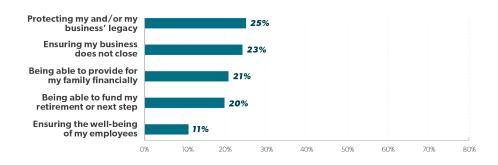
(Percentage of respondents)



#### 30

### What are your top three highest-priority goals when thinking about succession planning?

(Composite percentage representing the top three choices for respondents, weighted in order of preference) See subgroup analysis for more detail

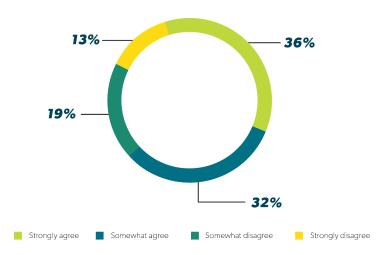


31

### I am worried about what will happen to my business when I step away.

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail

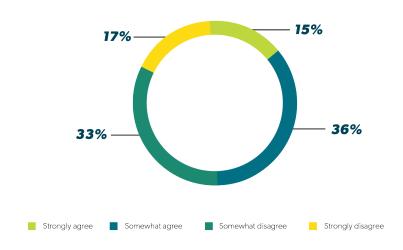


32

#### No one else could run my business as well as I do.

(Percentage of respondents)

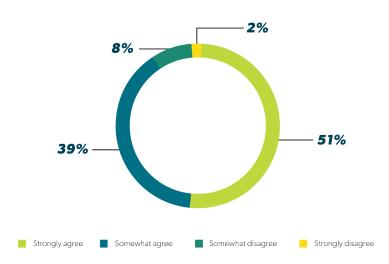
See subgroup analysis for more detail



#### 33

#### Owning my business is an important part of my identity.

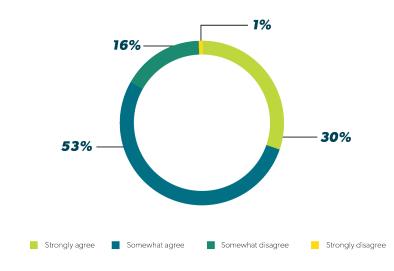
(Percentage of respondents)



#### 34

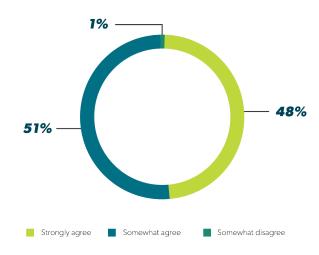
### I would have meaningful ways to spend my time if I left my business.

(Percentage of respondents)



#### I am confident I will be financially secure in my retirement.

(Percentage of respondents)

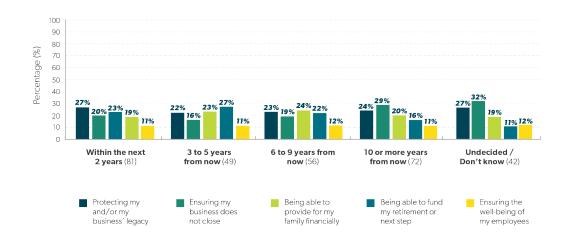


### SUBGROUP ANALYSIS



#### What are your top three highest-priority goals when thinking about succession planning?

(Composite percentage representing the top three choices for respondents, weighted in order of preference and grouped by expected exit timing) See Question 30

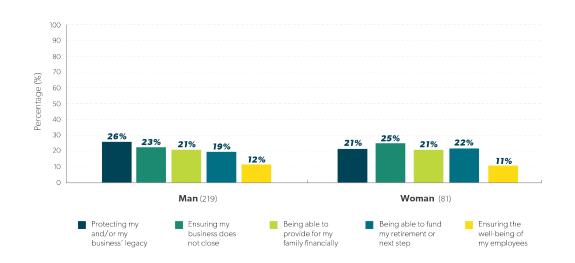




#### What are your top three highest-priority goals when thinking about succession planning?

(Composite percentage representing the top three choices for respondents, weighted in order of preference and grouped by gender) 

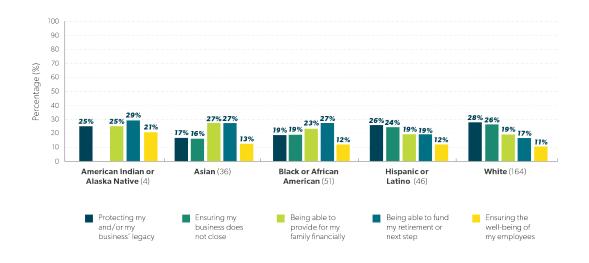
See Question 30



#### 30C

### What are your top three highest-priority goals when thinking about succession planning?

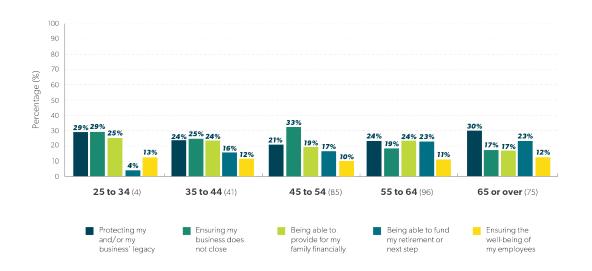
(Composite percentage representing the top three choices for respondents, weighted in order of preference and grouped by race and ethnicity See Question 30





#### What are your top three highest-priority goals when thinking about succession planning?

(Composite percentage representing the top three choices for respondents, weighted in order of preference and grouped by age) See Question 30

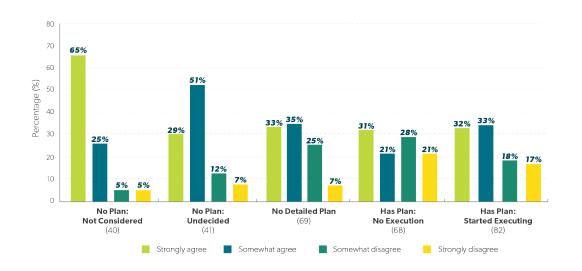




### I am worried about what will happen to my business when I step away.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by planning status)

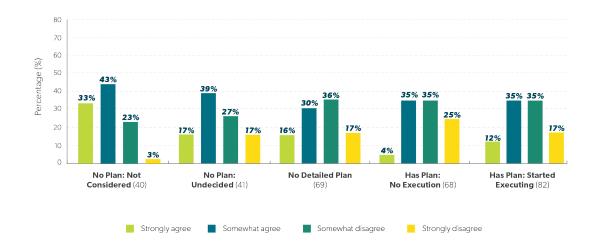






#### No one else could run my business as well as I do.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by planning status)



# FINDINGS: LIMITING FACTORS IMPACTING PLANNING

This section reviews factors that impact business owners' ability to effectively plan for their exit. Top barriers include:

- ▶ **Timing/Urgency:** Many business owners think its too early to begin succession planning, and may not view succession planning as the most urgent priority.
- **Bandwidth:** Business owners are busy and view succession planning as time-consuming and effortful.

Factors that don't appear to be significant barriers include:

- **Potential negative impact:** Some business owners worry about potential negative impacts of succession planning on their business or relationships; however, a large majority did not cite this as a barrier.
- ▶ <u>Uncertainty about the process:</u> Not knowing how the process works or viewing the process as difficult are not common reasons that business owners cite for not having a plan.
- **Awareness and intention:** Business owners are aware of succession planning. Very few have conclusively decided not to do it.

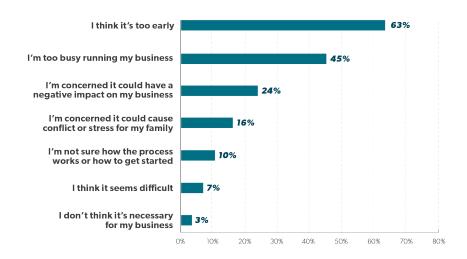


#### What has stopped you from creating a specific/detailed succession plan? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail

**Note:** Question asked to 143 respondents who reported knowing succession planning is something business do (Q43) and reported not having a succession plan in place (Q18).



The Additional Evidence sections that follow include additional findings that align with the response options in Q36 above.

Many business owners think it's too early to begin succession planning, and may not view succession planning as the most urgent priority.

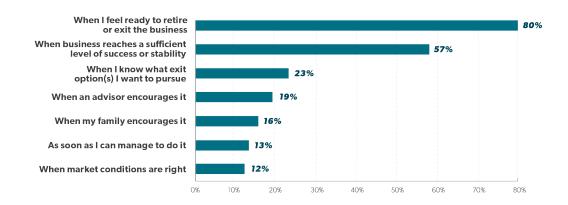


#### When do you think is the appropriate time to create a succession plan? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail

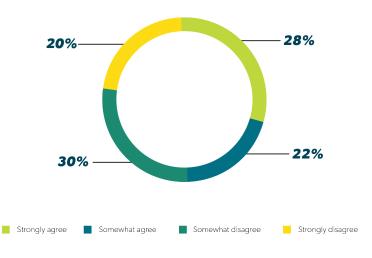
**Note:** Question asked to 148 respondents who reported not having a succession plan in place (Q18) and either intended to or were undecided about whether to create a succession plan in the future (Q45).



#### Succession planning is a priority for me right now.

(Percentage of respondents)

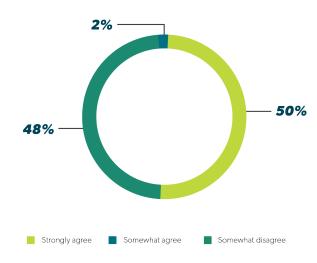
See subgroup analysis for more detail



Business owners are busy and view succession planning as time-consuming and effortful.

#### Succession planning requires a significant investment of time and effort.

(Percentage of respondents)

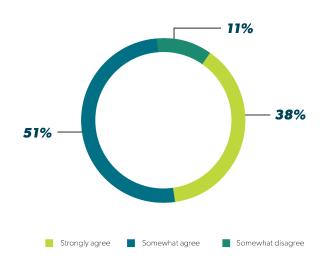


Some business owners worry about potential negative impacts of succession planning on their business or relationships; however, a large majority did not cite this as a barrier.



#### Succession planning requires a significant financial investment.

(Percentage of respondents)

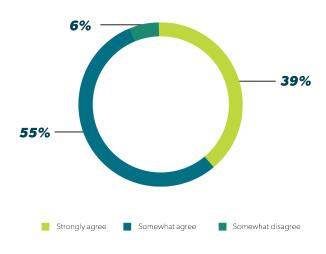




### Succession planning would have a positive impact on the future of my business.

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail



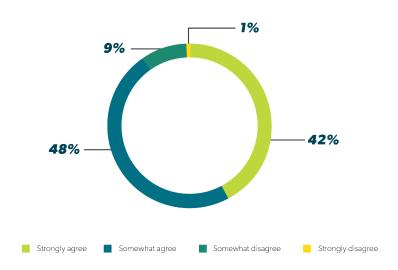
Not knowing how the process works or viewing the process as difficult are not common reasons that business owners cite for not having a plan.

### 41

### I understand the process required to create a succession plan.

(Percentage of respondents)

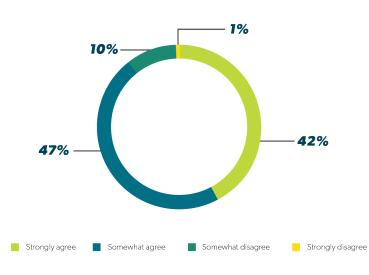
See subgroup analysis for more detail



#### 42

#### I know where to go for information or support for succession planning.

(Percentage of respondents)



Business owners are aware of succession planning. Very few have conclusively decided not to do it.



#### Did you know that succession planning is something some businesses do?

(Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 40 respondents who reported not having thought about what will happen to their business after they exit (Q18).

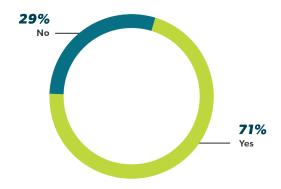




#### Are you interested in learning more about succession planning?

(Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 7 respondents who reported not knowing succession planning is something business do (Q43).

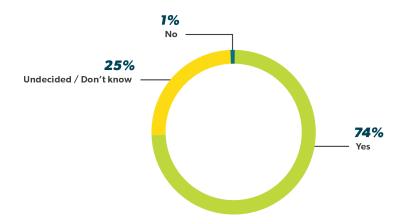




### Do you intend to create a specific/detailed succession plan in the future?

(Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 150 respondents who reported not having a succession plan in place (Q18).

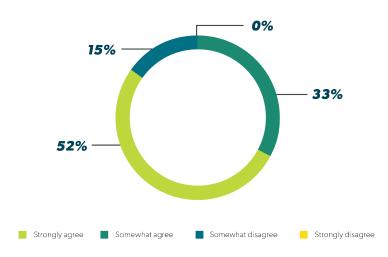


#### 46

#### Succession planning is typical for businesses like mine.

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail



## SECTION 5A SUBGROUP ANALYSIS

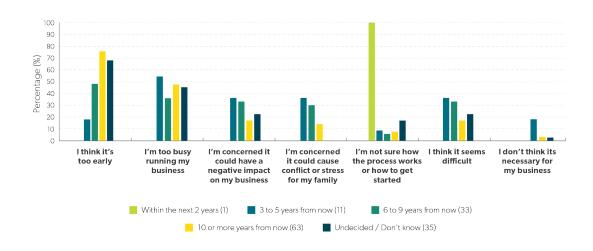


#### What has stopped you from creating a specific/detailed succession plan? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by expected exit timing)

See Question 36

**Note:** Question asked to 143 respondents who reported knowing succession planning is something business do (Q43) and reported not having a succession plan in place (Q18).



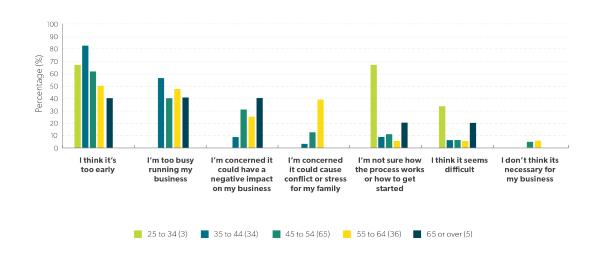


#### What has stopped you from creating a specific/detailed succession plan? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by age)

See Question 36

**Note:** Question asked to 143 respondents who reported knowing succession planning is something business do (Q43) and reported not having a succession plan in place (Q18).



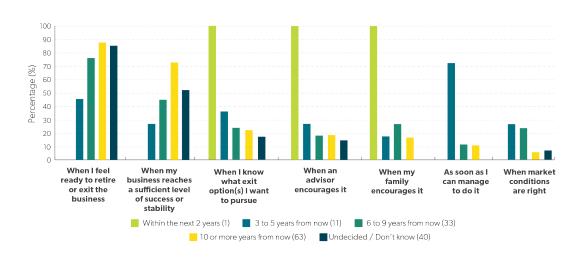


#### When do you think is the appropriate time to create a succession plan? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by expected exit timing)

See Question 22

**Note:** Question asked to 148 respondents who reported not having a succession plan in place (Q18) and either intended to or were undecided about whether to create a succession plan in the future (Q45).

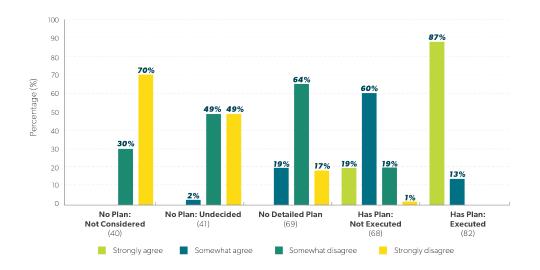


### 37A

#### Succession planning is a priority for me right now.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by planning status)

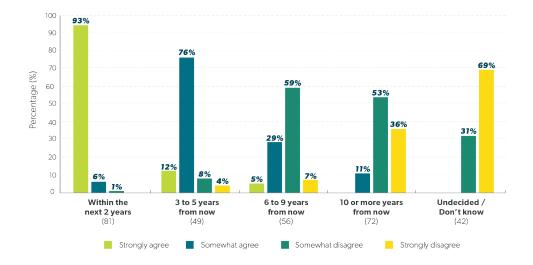
See Question 37



37B

#### Succession planning is a priority for me right now.

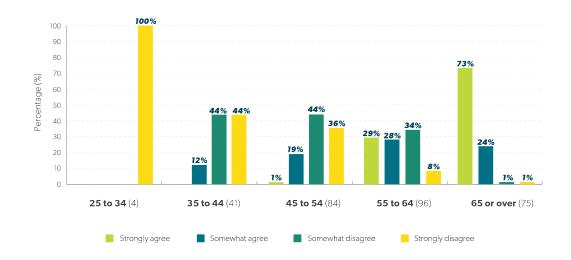
(Percentage of respondents, grouped by expected exit timing)



#### Succession planning is a priority for me right now.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by age)

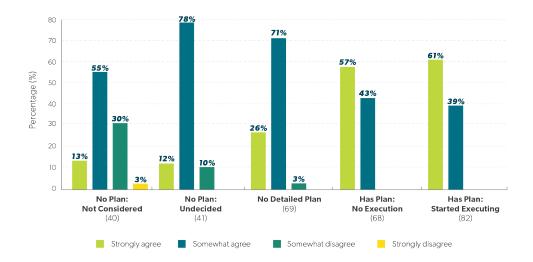
See Question 37





### Succession planning would have a positive impact on the future of my business.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by planning status)

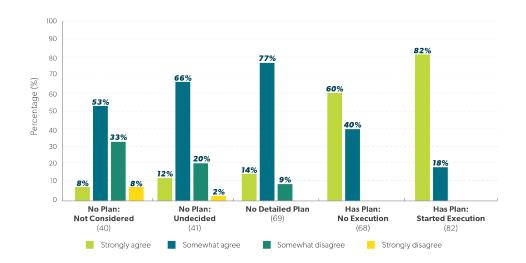




### I understand the process required to create a succession plan.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by planning status)

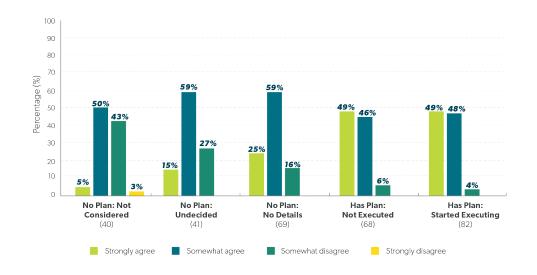
See Question 41



#### 46A

#### Succession planning is typical for businesses like mine.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by planning status)



#### **SECTION 6**

#### **FINDINGS: EXIT OPTIONS**

This section explores business owners' perceptions of different exit options. Key takeaways include:

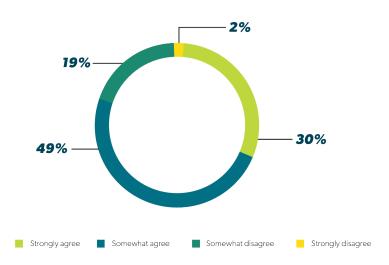
- ▶ Business owners generally express that they **understand and feel satisfied** with the options available, though understanding is lower among those who have done less planning.
- **Transferring the business to a family member** is the most common option that business owners consider and plan to pursue.
- Many business owners express interest in **maintaining ownership**, but having someone else take over management of the business. When these business owners are pressed to choose an option that involves giving up ownership, **many do not know** what option they would pursue.
- The majority of owners who have already **identified a buyer** did so through a business broker. The majority of owners who planned to sell the business but had *not* already identified a buyer planned to find a buyer by approaching other businesses they knew or current business partners, with a much smaller number expressing intention to work with a broker.



#### I have a good understanding of the different exit options that I could pursue when I decide to exit my business.

(Percentage of respondents)

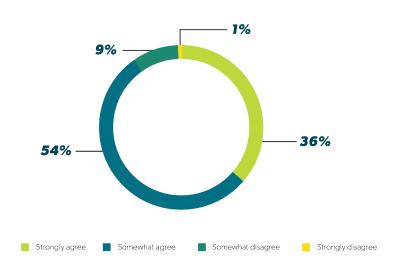
See subgroup analysis for more detail



#### 48

#### I am satisfied with the exit options that I expect will be available for my business when I decide to exit.

(Percentage of respondents)

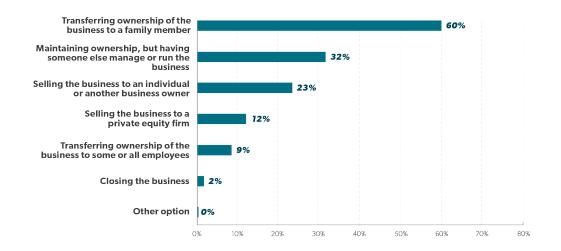




#### Please indicate any exit options you have already considered or would be open to considering in the future.

(Percentage of respondents)

See subgroup analysis for more detail

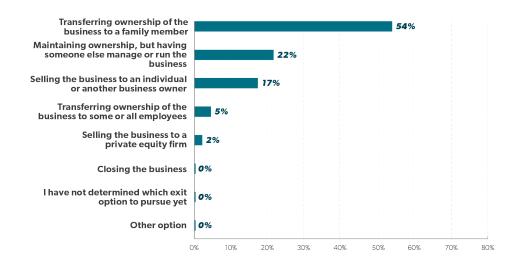


### 50

### Out of the exit options you are open to considering, which option are you most likely to pursue?

(Percentage of respondents)



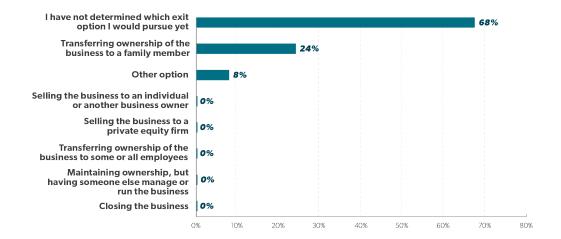




#### If you were unable to maintain ownership, which exit option would you be most likely to pursue?

(Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 37 respondents who reported that the exit option they are most likely to pursue is: "Maintaining ownership, but having someone else manage or run the business" (Q50).





#### Have you already identified a potential buyer (or buyers) for your business?

(Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 52 respondents who reported considering selling their business to an individual or another business owner (Q49) and reported this is the option they are most likely to pursue or have not determined which exit option to pursue yet (Q50).

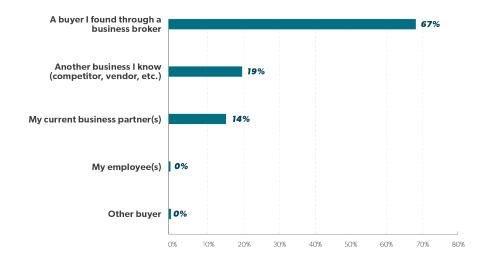


#### 53

#### Who is the potential buyer for your business?

(Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 21 respondents who reported having identified a buyer for their business (Q52).

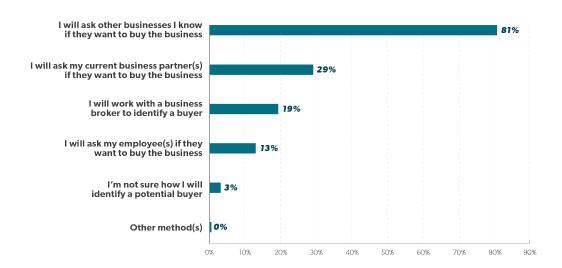


### 54

### How do you plan to identify a potential buyer? Select all that apply.

(Percentage of respondents)

**Note:** Question asked to 31 respondents who reported not having identified a buyer for their business (Q52).

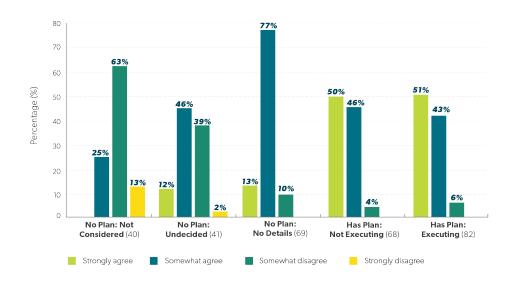


# SUBGROUP ANALYSIS



### I have a good understanding of the different exit options that I could pursue when I decide to exit my business.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by planning status)

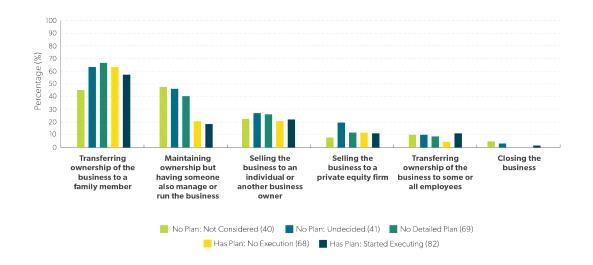




#### Please indicate any exit options you have already considered or would be open to considering in the future.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by planning status)

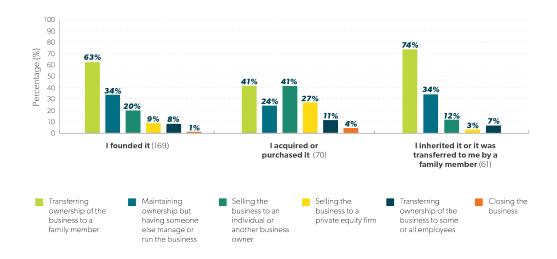
See Question 49





#### Please indicate any exit options you have already considered or would be open to considering in the future.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by basis for ownership)

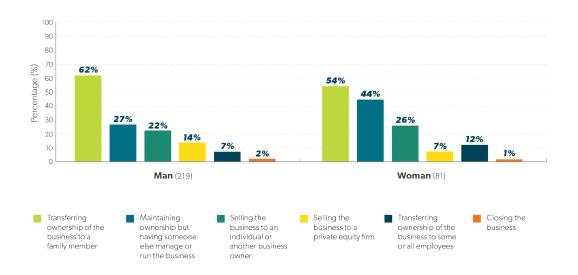




### Please indicate any exit options you have already considered or would be open to considering in the future.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by gender)

See Question 49





#### Please indicate any exit options you have already considered or would be open to considering in the future.

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by race and ethnicity)

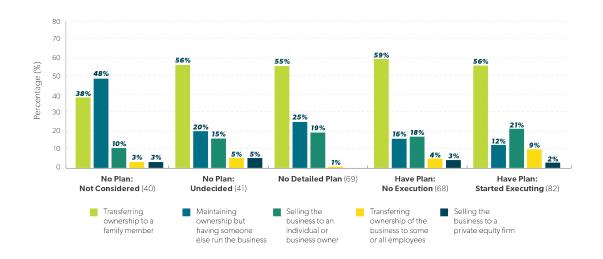




#### Out of the exit options you are open to considering, which option are you most likely to pursue?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by planning status)

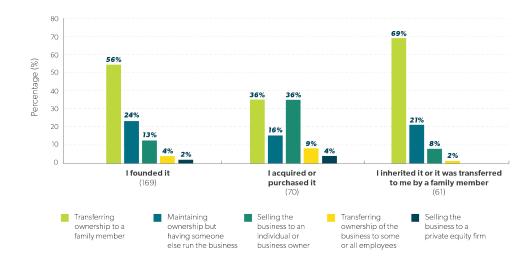
See Question 50



### 50B

#### Out of the exit options you are open to considering, which option are you most likely to pursue?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by origin of ownership)

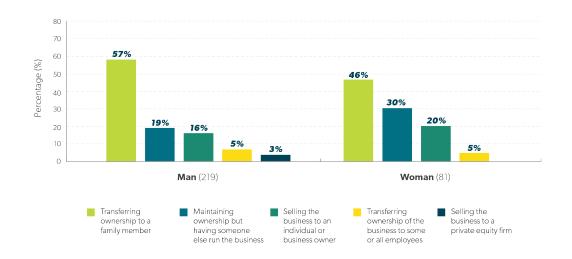




#### Out of the exit options you are open to considering, which option are you most likely to pursue?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by gender)

See Question 50



### 50D

#### Out of the exit options you are open to considering, which option are you most likely to pursue?

(Percentage of respondents, grouped by race and ethnicity)



