

News Release

Embargoed for release:
3:00 pm Eastern Time
2:00 pm Central Time
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What is the *Survey of Business Conditions*?

To support its Beige Book efforts, the Chicago Fed gathers information from its business contacts using an online survey system. Respondents are asked to rate various aspects of business conditions along a seven-point scale ranging from “substantially increased” to “substantially decreased.” A series of diffusion indexes summarizing the distribution of responses is then calculated.

How are the indexes constructed?

Respondents’ answers on the seven-point scale are assigned a numeric value ranging from +3 to -3. Each diffusion index is calculated as the difference between the number of respondents with answers above their respective average responses and the number of respondents with answers below their respective average responses, divided by the total number of respondents. The index is then multiplied by 100 so that it ranges from +100 to -100 and will be +100 if every respondent provides an above-average answer and -100 if every respondent provides a below-average answer. Respondents with no prior history of responses are excluded from the calculation.

What do the numbers mean?

Respondents’ respective average answers to a question can be interpreted as representing their historical trends or long-run averages. Thus, zero index values indicate that, on balance, activity, hiring, capital spending, or cost pressures are growing at their trend rates or that outlooks are neutral. Positive index values indicate above-average growth (or optimistic outlooks) on balance, and negative values indicate below-average growth (or pessimistic outlooks) on balance.

The next CFSBC will be released:
April 13, 2016
3:00 pm Eastern Time
2:00 pm Central Time

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Chicago Fed Survey of Business Conditions

Survey shows growth continued at a modest pace in January and early February

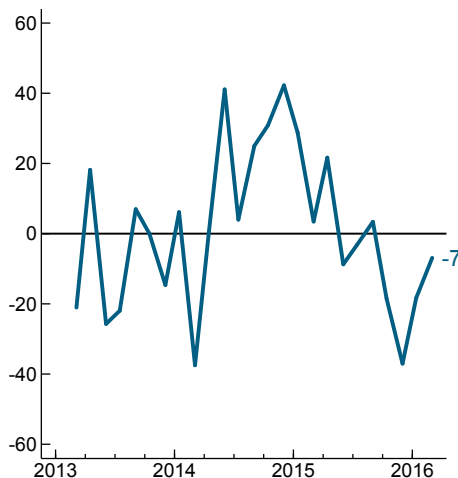
The *Chicago Fed Survey of Business Conditions* (CFSBC) Activity Index edged down to -19 from -17, suggesting that growth in economic activity continued at a modest pace in January and early February. The CFSBC Manufacturing Activity Index rose to -7 from -18, while the CFSBC Nonmanufacturing Activity Index declined to -25 from -16.

- Respondents’ outlooks for the U.S. economy for the next six to 12 months deteriorated, and turned pessimistic. Those respondents with pessimistic outlooks cited financial market volatility and heightened uncertainty about the pace of growth in the U.S. and abroad. Those with optimistic outlooks highlighted continuing improvement in the labor market.
- The pace of current hiring slowed some, but respondents’ expectations for the pace of hiring over the next six to 12 months improved. Both hiring indexes remained negative.
- The pace of current capital spending increased slightly, and respondents’ expectations for the pace of capital spending over the next six to 12 months also improved. However, both capital spending indexes remained negative.
- Wage costs picked up, while nonwage cost pressures declined. Both indexes remained negative.

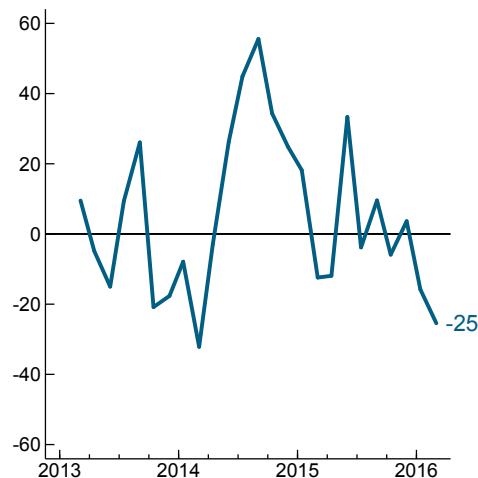
Activity Indexes: Overall and by Sector



Manufacturing



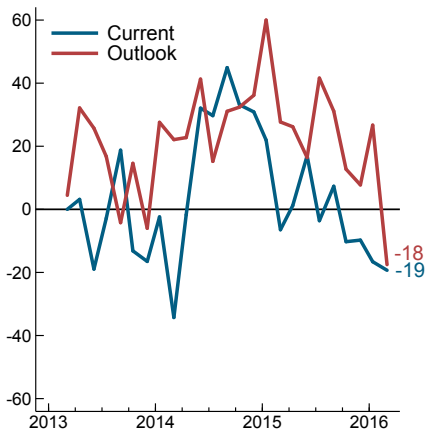
Nonmanufacturing



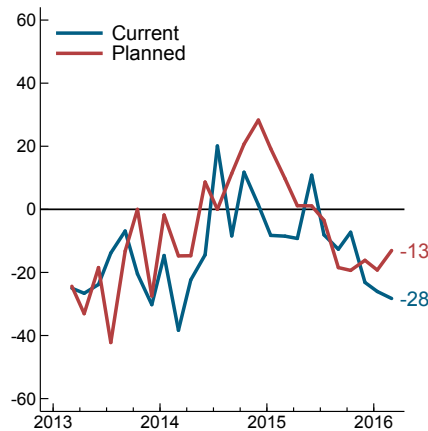
Notes: Positive readings of the overall activity index indicate that more respondents reported above-average growth in activity at their respective firms than below-average growth over the past four to six weeks. The manufacturing and nonmanufacturing activity indexes are calculated in a similar manner by dividing survey responses between manufacturing and nonmanufacturing firms. All three indexes are measured in percentage terms, such that if all respondents report above-average growth they will be +100; and, conversely, if all respondents report below-average growth they will be -100 (see the sidebar for further details on the indexes’ construction).

Additional Survey Results

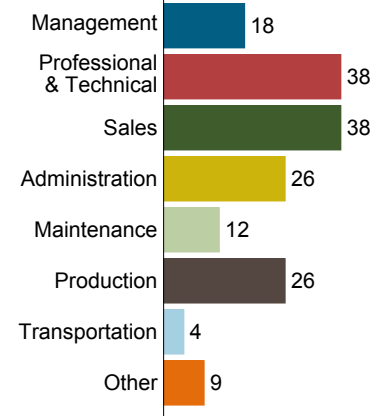
Activity



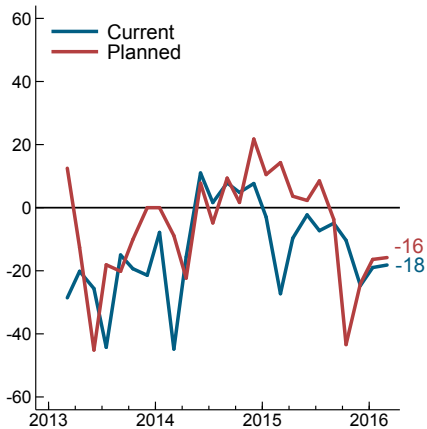
Hiring



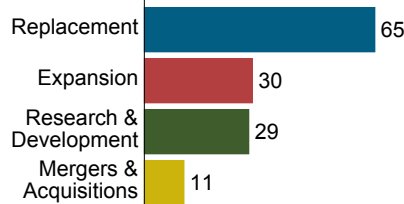
Occupations (%)



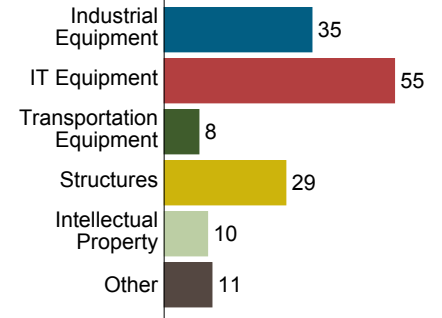
Capital Spending



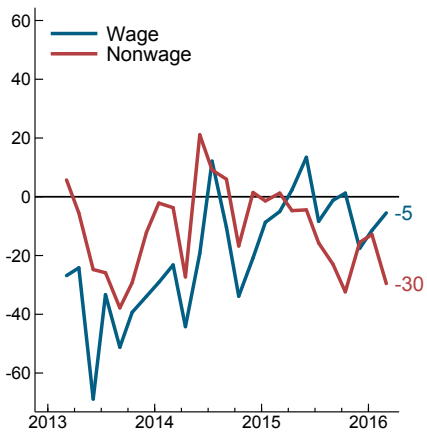
Spending for (%)



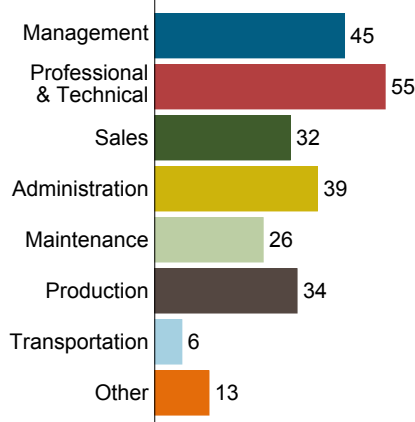
Spending on (%)



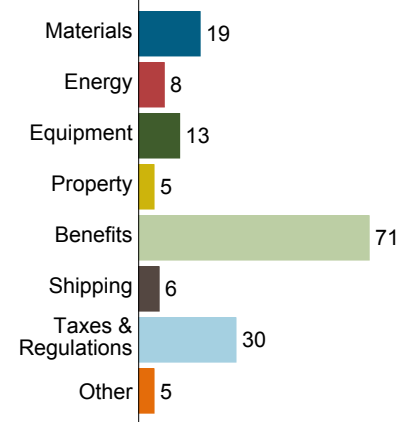
Cost Pressures



Increasing Wage Costs (%)



Increasing Nonwage Costs (%)



NOTES: Positive readings of the current activity, hiring, capital spending, and wage and nonwage cost pressures indexes indicate that more respondents reported above-average growth at their respective firms than below-average growth in current activity, hiring, capital spending, and wage and nonwage cost pressures. Positive readings of the planned hiring and capital spending indexes indicate similar outcomes for questions pertaining to expectations for hiring and capital spending in the next six to 12 months. Positive readings of the outlook index indicate more respondents reported above-average outlooks for the U.S. economy over the next six to 12 months than below-average ones. The bar charts report the percentage of responses for types of occupations currently in demand; reasons for capital spending and its allocation; and sources of increasing wage and nonwage cost pressures. The numbers may add up to more than 100 percent because more than one option can be chosen.