Economic Conditions and Outlook

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The views herein are those of the presenter and do not necessarily reflect those of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City or the Federal Reserve System.
Outlook themes

• After several months of sustained economic recovery, uncertainty about the outlook increased due to the pandemic

• Consumers have generally continued to spend as the Delta variant emerged, but employment growth slowed in some pandemic-sensitive sectors

• Recovery in employment has been uneven between small and large businesses, as well as across demographic groups

• Cost pressures are elevated and inflation is currently running above 2 percent
Uncertainty about the outlook is growing amid rising COVID cases
Yet, consumer spending has been more resilient during the Delta wave, as compared to previous waves of the pandemic.

Sources: Opportunity Insights, CDC

Notes: Percentage change in retail spending is relative to January 2020 levels.
Consumer spending on goods is moderating from its surge during the pandemic, while spending on services is still recovering.
Job gains slowed in August, particularly in pandemic-sensitive sectors.
Recovery among small businesses, which account for a substantial share of employment, has only recently begun to pick up.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Staff
Note: Values are a 5 year average taken between 2015 and 2019
Labor force participation remains well below pre-pandemic levels
Overall unemployment continues to decline but remains elevated, particularly for some minority workers.

Sources: BLS, Haver Analytics

Notes: Grey bars indicate recession shading.
Manufacturing activity continues to expand, but at a slower rate than during the first half of the year.
Wage growth is showing some signs of moderating generally, but remains elevated for low-skill jobs by historical standards.

Sources: Current Population Survey, Staff, NBER, Haver Analytics

Notes: Grey bars indicate recession shading.
In addition to wage pressures, cost pressures for materials at various stages of production are elevated due to supply constraints.

Sources: BLS, NBER, Haver Analytics
Notes: Grey bars indicate recession shading
After running below 2 percent for some time, inflation currently exceeds the Federal Reserve’s target.
Housing price growth slowed somewhat during the pandemic, but began to pick up earlier this year.
The latest projections from the FOMC indicate potential for changes in monetary policy sooner than reported earlier this year.
The Fed could begin to taper asset purchases that supported smooth market functioning if the outlook continues to meet expectations.
Looking forward

• Uncertainty about the outlook is rising, potentially leading to some precautionary behavior that will moderate the speed of the recovery

• So far, consumer spending has remained resilient into the Delta wave of the pandemic

• Some cost pressures that were tied to disruptions during the pandemic are showing signs of moderating, but overall inflation remains above its 2 percent target