Maribyrnong
CITY COUNCIL

CITY OF
MARIBYRNONG

BUSINESS NEEDS SURVEY 2023

Prepared by the
Economic Development
& Smart Cities Unit

Introduction

The annual 'Business Needs Survey' was conducted by Council's City Futures department in April 2023. A total of 90 responses were received and the insights gained will help inform Council's Economic Development for the 2023-24 financial year. This summary is a shortened version which highlights the key findings.

Comparison to 2021 survey

The 2021 Business survey was conducted in October 2021, a period when recovery from Covid-19 lockdowns was still a high priority. The 2023 survey has almost no reference to the Covid-19 and 'covid recovery' isn't something that was raised by any respondents.

Where possible the same questions were used to enable a comparison, and where there is something to note, some additional comments have been added throughout this summary.

Methodology

This survey was delivered by Council directly via Survey Monkey with the support and direction of the Community engagement team.

The survey was shared digitally via:

- **The City of Maribyrnong Business Bulletin (Which is sent to a distribution list of 5000 businesses)**
- **Social media channels (Facebook, Linked In)**
- **Via email to Business Trader Groups**

The survey was also shared directly with businesses via:

- **Flyer distribution at the City of Maribyrnong Business Breakfast in March 2023**
- **Flyer drop offs to businesses**

An incentive was made available with 3 x $100 gift vouchers being made available as a prize to be drawn randomly at the completion of the survey period.

Which businesses are represented by the survey results?

This survey had 90 responses and was completed by predominately smaller businesses with nearly 68% of respondents employing less than 5 people and less than 8% employing more than 20 staff. Nearly 30% of respondents identified as being a 'Home Based Business'. There was a good geographic spread of respondents, though none from the Tottenham suburb which is predominately an industrial precinct. A wide range of industries were represented with public facing businesses such as 'Accommodation & Food Services' and 'Retail Trade' making up nearly 38%. Over 80% of respondents have been operating for in excess of 3 years, which indicates a good level of business maturity and resilience with over 36% having been operating for 10 years or more.

Comparison to 2021:

It was a remarkably similar breakdown of responses with 89 responses in 2021 with a similar distribution across the suburbs and industries. There was an increase of responses from businesses who have been operating for 10 years or more in 2023 which jumped from 24% to 36% which suggests a more experienced cohort.

Business Location (Suburb)

Footscray	37.5%
Yarraville	18.2%
Seddon	14.8%
Maribyrnong	12.5%
West Footscray	9.1%
Braybrook	4.5%
Kingsville	2.3%
Maidstone	1.1%
Tottenham	0%

Business Size (Employee numbers):

Sole Trader	26.7%
Employing 2-5 people	42%
Employing 6-10 people	13%
Employing 11-20 people	10%
Employing more than 20 people	7.7%

Business Maturity (Length of operations)

Less than 12 months	7.8%
1 – 2 years	13.3%
3 – 5 years	23.3%
6 – 10 years	18.9%
Over 10 years	36.7%

Industry Type:

Accommodation & Food Services	21%
Retail Trade	16.7%
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	14.4%
Education & Training	7.8%
Manufacturing	6.7%
Information Media & Telecommunications	6.7%
Health Care & Social Assistance	5.6%
Arts & Recreation Services	4.4%
Financial & Insurance Services	4.4%
Construction	1%
Rental, Hiring & Real Estate Services	1%
Other	10%

Type of business premises:

Commercial space in an activity centre or shopping strip	38.9%
Homebased business	28.9%
Commercial or warehouse space in an industrial area	8.9%
Co-working or sublease arrangement	7.8%
Other	15.6%

Business Training & Support Needs

Businesses were asked to identify the top 5 areas that they would like some training and support in. The top 5 topics represent some of the key business fundamentals and are no surprise, however we see that 'Mental Health & Management' is quite high which perhaps reflects the growing pressure that many business owners are feeling.

In terms of preferred formats for learning there is a fairly even mix between face-to-face and online, which means that it makes sense to continue to use of a range of options.

Comparison to 2021:

The top 5 areas identified are identical though in 2021 the category "Help to Stay Covid Safe" was an option that made the top 5. There also seems to be more emphasis on 'Business Efficiency" as something that businesses want some support worth.

	# of times selected
Strategic Business Planning	40
Sales Training & Marketing	29
Grant & Tender Writing	29
Website Development & Optimisation	26
Financial Management	22
Networking Skills	22
Mental Health & Stress Management	20
Leadership / Management	20
Improving Business Efficiency	20
Time Management Skills	16
Upskilling of Staff	16
Support & Training to improve accessibility of your business / Accessibility appraisal	14
Human Resources	14
Cybersecurity & Data Privacy	13
Environmental Sustainability and climate change impacts	11
Business Law	7
Succession Planning + Exiting your business	7
Improving creativity & Innovation	6

Preferred formats for learning new business skills:

Face to Face in a class room environment with other business people	45
One-on-one with a mentor or trainer	43
Online (via Zoom etc.)	42
Self-study	32
In your workplace	23

Business Confidence:

When asked how confident they were that they would be still operating in 12 months' time, the average response was 8.8/10.

When asked to look ahead and consider whether they would be still operating in 2 years' time, that level of confidence drops back slightly to an average of 8.4/10.

While this overall average sounds OK, given that most businesses completing the survey have over 3 years of experience, it reflects that there is some uncertainty about business continuity.

Comparison to 2021:

In 2021, the 12 months confidence level was 8/10, while the 24 month outlook was 7.4/10 which shows that in 2023 there is generally a higher level of confidence than immediately after the Covid-lockdowns.

Staffing levels:

When asked to compare the number of staff employed with the business now compared to before the Covid-19 pandemic, the responses showed that 43% had stayed at the same level of staffing with 33% actually increasing staff, while 14.6% had a decrease.

This is perhaps reflective of the businesses that benefited the most from the post-covid bounce back such as those in the dining and entertainment sector when additional staff resources were needed.

When asked to project out over the next 12 months ahead, there is strong confidence in the staffing levels with 60% expecting to retain the same level of staff, 37% expecting to increase staff and just 2.4% expecting to decrease staff levels.

Connectedness & Trader Associations:

When asked how 'connected' they felt with the local business community, the average response was 5.8/10. Given that many business operators surveyed are sole-traders or employ less than 5 people, it does indicate that there is an opportunity to help better connect business operators.

Comparison to 2021

The average response for this same question in 2021 was 5/10, which indicates there is some improvement, but still a long way to go to help businesses owners feeling connected in their local business community.

56% of respondents indicated that they were a member of a local Trader Association or some sort of business group.

Businesses that indicated they were not currently a member of an association or business group cited the following reasons, which suggests there is an opportunity for trader groups to raise their profile:

Not aware of local trader groups	19
No trader groups apply to my industry or geographic area	18
Don't have time to be involved in trader groups	12
Don't see the value in being a member / too expensive	11
Have previously been a member but didn't get much out of it	3

Networking Events

When asked how much value they place in attending business networking events the average response was 8.7/10, which indicates that there is appetite for more networking events.

In terms of the preferred window of time to attend networking events, it was a fairly even spread across the day with the afterhours time slot slightly more popular than the morning slot.

Early Morning (7am – 9am)	29
Morning (9am – 12pm)	32
Afternoon (12pm – 5pm)	21
Afterhours (5pm – 9pm	33

In regards to the preferred type of networking event, again there was a fairly even spread across the available options:

Face-to-face casual networking	41
Mastermind sessions with business owners	41
Regular networking with businesses in the same industry as your business	40
Structured online networking	32
Large scale face-to-face Business Networking Breakfasts	7

Comparison to 2021

The event preferences were almost identical in 2021, though the afterhours time slot had a slightly stronger preference compared to 2023.

Business Sustainability

When asked how much importance was placed on improving sustainability, reducing energy and minimising waste, the average response score was 7.9/10.

When asked what sustainability measures that businesses have already implemented, there was a good spread of responses:

Energy efficiency review & upgrade	47
Implementing measures to reduce waste and increase recycling	47
Switching to digital solutions	29
Changing your procurement practices to source low waste, low energy or sustainable products	22
Water Saving measures	13
Upgrading of plant and equipment	10
Installation of solar panels	8
Purchasing renewable energy	5
Transitioning away from natural gas	3

In regards to the type of support that businesses want to become more sustainable, the clear leader was for there to be more "grants and funding made available to businesses".

Grants and funding support to help install environmental upgrades	43
Programs to recognise and support sustainable businesses	21
Better connection with other like-minded businesses	18
Participate in facilitated collaborative procurement opportunities such as a renewable buyers group	17
No Support Needed	13
Other	2

Comparison to 2021

While grants was also the number 1 option in 2021, the idea of "Programs to recognise and support sustainable businesses" was quite low, which indicates a bit of shift in this area and some sort of recognition program might be a good option for Council to explore.

Next steps

The findings of this survey will be used to help plan and curate business support programs for the 2023-24 financial year such as networking events and business training programs.

While things such as 'Business Confidence' and 'Plans to employ staff' are impacted by the broader macro-economic conditions beyond the scope of Council, there are things such as the 'Sense of Connectedness' which is an area that Council can play an important role in.

If you would like to connect with the Economic Development & Smart Cities unit, send us an email at: business@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au