

MARIBYRNONG
CITY COUNCIL

BUSINESS NEEDS SURVEY 2024

Prepared by the
Economic Development
& Smart Cities Unit

Introduction

The annual 'Business Needs Survey' was conducted by Council's City Futures department in April 2024. A total of 139 responses were received which was a 54% increase on the 2023 survey. The insights gained helped inform Council's Economic Development for the 2024-25 financial year. This summary is a shortened version which highlights the key findings.

Comparison to 2023 survey

The 2023 Business survey was conducted in April 2023 and had 90 responses.

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. Responses were kept anonymous.

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 in a range of precincts.**

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 139 responses and was completed by predominately smaller businesses with nearly 56% of respondents employing less than 5 people however there was a decent representation of over 15% that were employing more than 20 staff. Nearly 23% of respondents identified as being a 'Home Based Business'. There was a good geographic spread of respondents, with a couple from Tottenham this year 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 39%. Over 85% of respondents have been operating for in excess of 3 years, which indicates a good level of business maturity and resilience with over 32% having been operating for 10 years or more. Over 46% of respondents were operating from a Commercial Space in an Activity Centre or Shopping Centre.

Business Closures

The 2024 Survey included a new question which asked whether the business has closed in the last 12 months. There was a relatively high response of 26 business closures (or 18.7% of total responses). Businesses that identified as having closed were asked a separate set of questions to help Council better understand the circumstances of the closures.

Comparison to 2023:

There were quite a few changes between 2023 and 2024. The biggest representation of responses were from Yarraville and Seddon with Footscray having a much smaller response. There was also a much stronger response from larger employers with 20+ staff. There was also a much larger representation of businesses with 6-10 years of operation which helps add validity to the survey as more respondents had 'time in the game' and experience they could draw from when responding.

Business Location (Suburb)

| | 2023 | 2024 |
|----------------|-------|-------|
| Yarraville | 18.2% | 24.5% |
| Seddon | 14.8% | 19.6% |
| Footscray | 37.5% | 18.6% |
| Maribyrnong | 12.5% | 10.8% |
| West Footscray | 9.1% | 5.9% |
| Braybrook | 4.5% | 7.8% |
| Kingsville | 2.3% | 4.9% |
| Maidstone | 1.1% | 4.9% |
| Tottenham | 0% | 2.94% |

Business Size (Employee numbers):

| | 2023 | 2024 |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Sole Trader | 26.7% | 25.5% |
| Employing 2-5 people | 42% | 30.4% |
| Employing 6-10 people | 13% | 14.7% |
| Employing 11-20 people | 10% | 11.8% |
| Employing more than 20 people | 7.7% | 15.6% |

Business Maturity (Length of operations)

| | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Less than 12 months | 7.8% | 5.9% |
| 1 – 2 years | 13.3% | 9.8% |
| 3 – 5 years | 23.3% | 22.6% |
| 6 – 10 years | 18.9% | 29.4% |
| Over 10 years | 36.7% | 32.4% |

Industry Type:

| | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Retail Trade | 16.7% | 28.4% |
| Accommodation & Food Services | 21% | 13.7% |
| Health Care & Social Assistance | 5.6% | 10.8% |
| Arts & Recreation Services | 4.4% | 8.8% |
| Professional, Scientific & Technical Services | 14.4% | 5.9% |
| Manufacturing | 6.7% | 5.9% |
| Transport Postal and warehousing | | 3.9% |
| Information Media & Telecommunications | 6.7% | 2.9% |
| Financial & Insurance Services | 4.4% | 2.9% |
| Education & Training | 7.8% | 2% |
| Construction | 1% | 1% |
| Rental, Hiring & Real Estate Services | 1% | 1% |
| Other | 10% | 12.7% |

Type of business premises:

| | 2023 | 2024 |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Commercial space in an activity centre or shopping strip | 38.9% | 46.1% |
| Homebased business | 28.9% | 22.6% |
| Commercial or warehouse space in an industrial area | 8.9% | 12.8% |
| Co-working or sublease arrangement | 7.8% | 8.8% |
| Other | 15.6% | 9.8% |

Business Training & Support Needs

Businesses were asked to identify the top 5 areas that they would like some training and support in.

In terms of preferred formats for learning there is a wider gap between Face-to-face and online, which is suggesting people have reached 'peak webinar training', and would prefer to be in a room to learn with others.

Comparison to 2023:

In 2023 the "Strategic Business Planning" option was clearly the no.1 preferred option. In 2024 it is a much more even spread across the top 5 or 6 options.

| | # of times selected | |
|--|---------------------|------|
| | 2023 | 2024 |
| Website Development & Optimisation | 26 | 29 |
| Sales Training & Marketing | 29 | 28 |
| Improving Business Efficiency | 20 | 27 |
| Strategic Business Planning | 40 | 25 |
| Cybersecurity & Data Privacy | 13 | 23 |
| Financial Management | 22 | 23 |
| Support & Training to improve accessibility of your business / Accessibility appraisal | 14 | 21 |
| Mental Health & Stress Management | 20 | 19 |
| Grant & Tender Writing | 29 | 18 |
| Leadership / Management | 20 | 18 |
| Networking Skills | 22 | 16 |
| Human Resources | 14 | 15 |
| Upskilling of Staff | 16 | 13 |
| Environmental Sustainability and climate change impacts | 11 | 13 |
| Improving creativity & Innovation | 6 | 11 |
| Succession Planning + Exiting your business | 7 | 8 |
| Time Management Skills | 16 | 7 |
| Business Law | 7 | 4 |

Preferred formats for learning new business skills:

| | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|------|------|
| Face to Face in a class room environment with other business people | 45 | 52 |
| One-on-one with a mentor or trainer | 43 | 45 |
| Online (via Zoom etc.) | 42 | 42 |
| Self-study | 32 | 26 |
| In your workplace | 23 | 24 |

Business Confidence:

When asked how confident they were that they would be still operating in 12 months' time, the average response was 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 7.4/10.

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 2023:

In 2023, the 12 month confidence level was 8.8/10, while the 24 month outlook was 8.4/10 which shows that in 2024 the overall business confidence has dropped slightly.

Staffing levels:

When asked to compare the number of staff employed with the business now compared to April 2023 the responses showed that 54% had stayed at the same level of staffing with 25.3% actually increasing staff, while 21% had a decrease.

When asked to project out over the next 12 months ahead, there is strong confidence in the staffing levels with 54% expecting to retain the same level of staff, 34% expecting to increase staff and 7.7% expecting to decrease staff levels. These numbers are less optimistic than in 2023 and again reflect the decline in business confidence over the 12 month period.

Comparison to 2023:

The outlook in 2023 was much more positive with 60% expecting to employ staff, and just 2% 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 through networking events, and industry focussed training.

Comparison to 2023

The average response for this same question in 2021 was also 5.8/10.

55% of respondents indicated that they were not 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 | 21% |
| No trader groups apply to my industry or geographic area | 20% |
| Don't have time to be involved in trader groups | 32% |
| Don't see the value in being a member / too expensive | 14.3% |
| Have previously been a member but didn't get much out of it | 6.6% |
| Other | 32% |

Networking Events

When asked how much value they place in attending business networking events the average response was 6.2/10. This was a significant drop from 2023 where the value was over 8. This may be a reflection of the higher number of ‘bricks and mortar’ businesses surveyed this year where it is often harder to leave the business to attend events.

In terms of the preferred window of time to attend networking events, it was a fairly even spread across the daylight hours, but with the afterhours time slot significantly more popular than the rest.

| | |
|---------------------------|----|
| Early Morning (7am – 9am) | 26 |
| Morning (9am – 12pm) | 31 |
| Afternoon (12pm – 5pm) | 24 |
| Afterhours (5pm – 9pm) | 40 |

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

| | |
|--|----|
| Mastermind sessions with business owners | 45 |
| Face-to-face casual networking | 41 |
| Regular networking with businesses in the same industry as your business | 40 |
| Structured online networking | 31 |
| Large scale face-to-face Business Networking Breakfasts | 23 |

Comparison to 2023

The event preferences were almost identical in 2024, though the after hours time slot had a slightly stronger preference compared to 2023. The ‘Mastermind’ session format has nudged ahead to no.1 spot as the preferred format for networking events.

Business Sustainability

When asked how much importance was placed on improving sustainability, reducing energy and minimising waste, the average response score was 7.6/10.

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

| | |
|---|----|
| Increasing Recycling activities | 42 |
| Reducing Plastic or soft plastic consumption | 41 |
| Implementing measures to reduce waste | 40 |
| Switching to digital solutions | 29 |
| Energy efficiency review & upgrade | 28 |
| Choosing Suppliers who have proven sustainability credentials | 24 |
| Changing your procurement practices to source low waste, low energy or sustainable products | 22 |
| Water Saving measures | 20 |
| Upgrading of plant and equipment | 13 |
| Installation of solar panels | 12 |
| Calculating business annual carbon emissions | 9 |
| Transitioning away from natural gas | 9 |

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 |
| Information Sharing and Education | 34 |
| Programs to recognise and support sustainable businesses | 22 |
| Better connection with other like-minded businesses | 23 |
| Participate in facilitated collaborative procurement opportunities such as a renewable buyers group | 14 |
| No Support Needed | 18 |

Comparison to 2023

A number of new options were added to the 2023 survey, however there is no change to the type of support preferred with most businesses wanting grants and funding to help support the installation of environmental upgrades.

Next steps

The findings of this survey will be used to help plan and curate business support programs for the 2024-25 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 have any questions about the survey please connect with the Economic Development & Smart Cities unit via email at: business@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au