Rural City of Wangaratta

2025 Business Health Check Survey Report

ABOUT THE SURVEY

In February 2025, we launched the first Business Health Check Survey to better understand the needs and challenges of our local businesses. This survey delivers on a key action in the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2024–2029, which commits to checking in with businesses each year and using their feedback to shape the support we offer.

The insights we've gathered give us a clearer picture of what's happening across our business community — highlighting both the opportunities and the pressures local operators are facing. This helps Council plan more effectively and respond to what matters most.

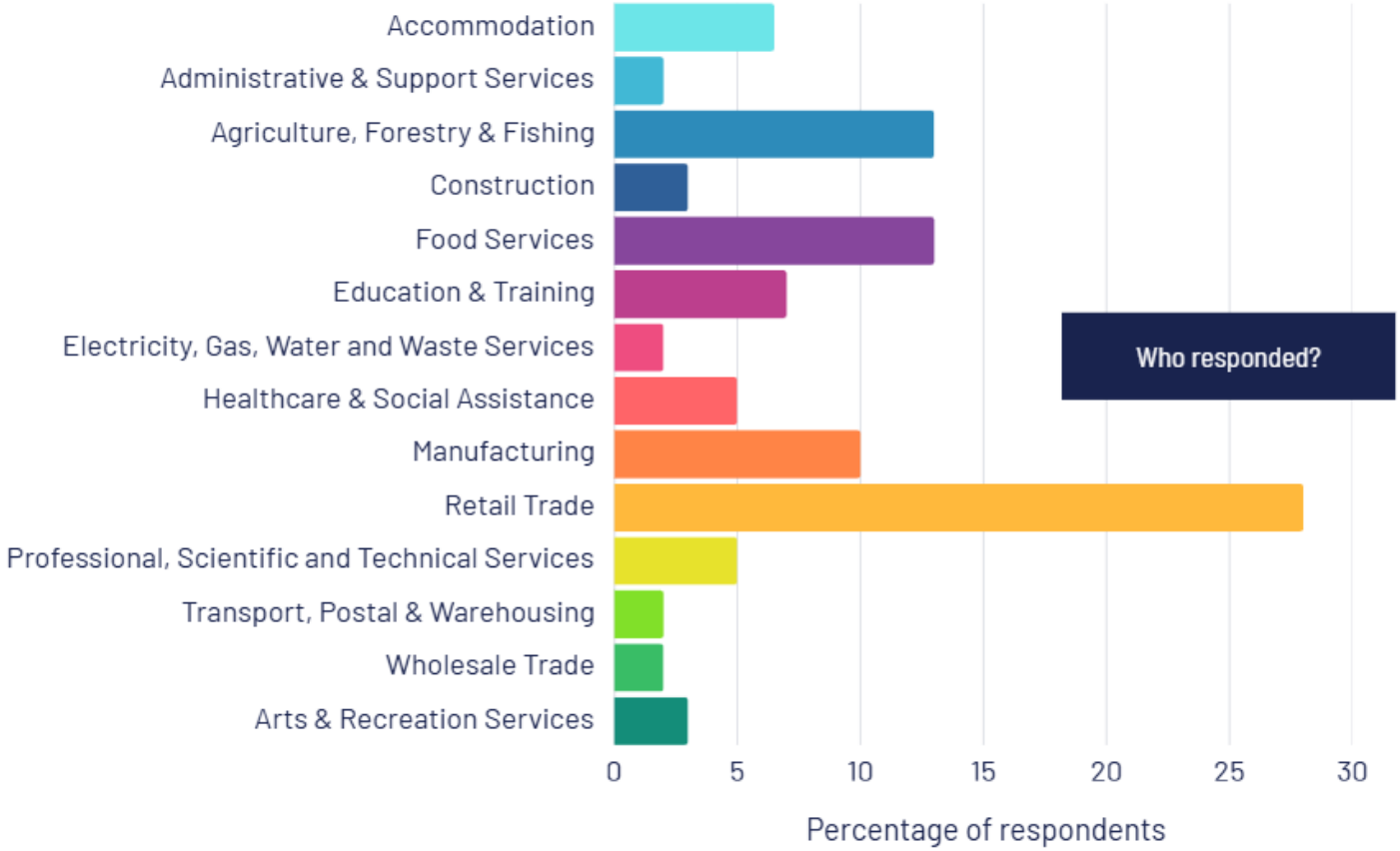
The survey was launched at our Annual Business Forum on 20 February and remained open for eight weeks. During this time, we connected with businesses through visits, events, online campaigns, and workshops right across the Rural City of Wangaratta.

Key highlights

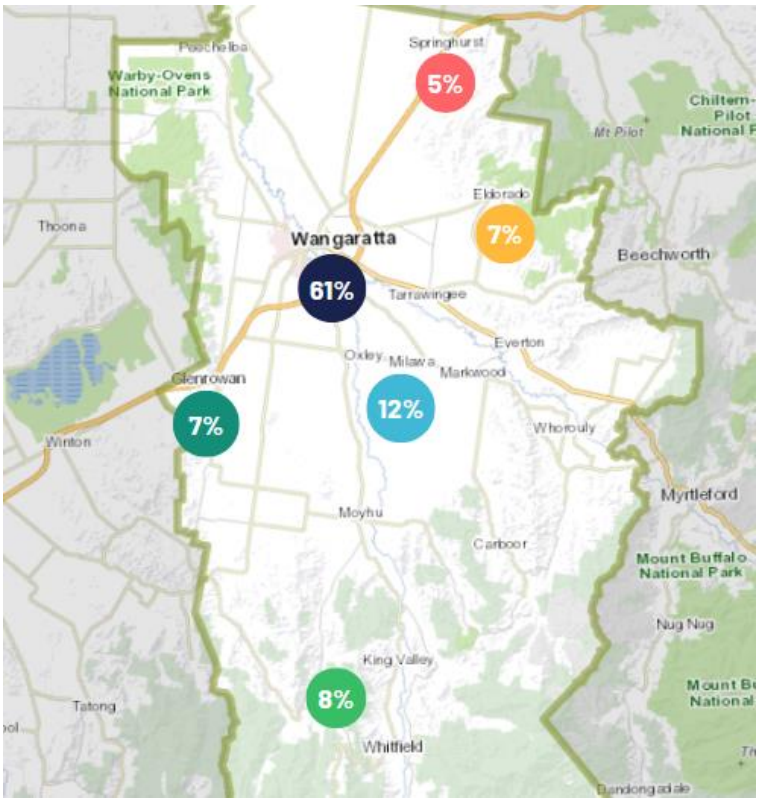
- Rising Costs and Skill Shortages are Major Challenges
- Digital Sales and Marketing are underused
- Training and Business Continuity Planning are Underdeveloped
- Businesses want faster support and Practical Assistance

ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

The top five sectors in the Rural City of Wangaratta – Health Care and Social Services, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Manufacturing, Retail Trade and Construction were all represented in the survey. Respondents came from a wide range of industries, operating across various townships and business premises, with a mix of owned and leased locations.



Operating business from across the Rural City of Wangaratta



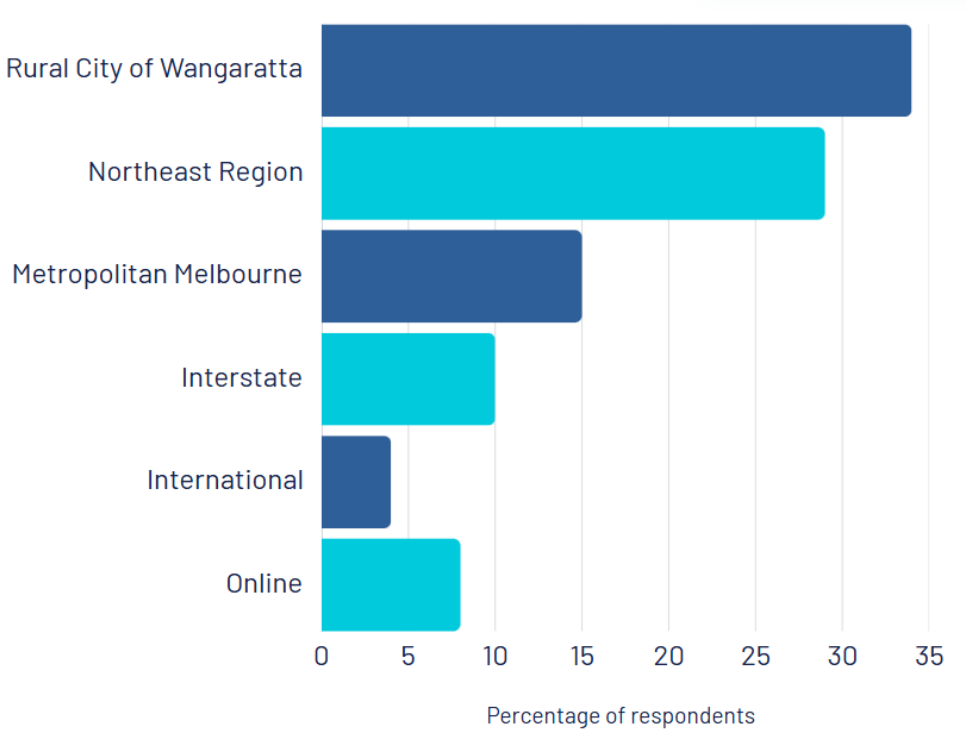
Why respondents choose the Rural City of Wangaratta to run their business

*Larger text size represents higher response rates



SALES AND MARKETING

% businesses are primarily selling to customers in





Most businesses are selling within the Rural City of Wangaratta (34%) or the broader Northeast Region (29%). Online sales are still developing, with only 8% of businesses reporting digital revenue. Meta (Facebook/Instagram) and websites are the most commonly used and effective marketing platforms, though LinkedIn remains underused.



Revenue generated from online sales

Overall, businesses had a lack of understanding in their rates of online sales, as even those that indicated they sold online couldn't necessarily quantify it.

- 7% of businesses reported $0 in online sales revenue
- Only 19% earn more than 50% of their revenue online
- Retail leads the way—around 40% report making at least 10% of revenue online
- Other sectors are less engaged or less confident in online sales

Retail businesses showed the most online sales activity, with around 40% earning at least 10% of their revenue from online channels, while others in the sector still aren't selling online at all. Accommodation and Food Services were mixed, with some earning small amounts online, others generating more than half their revenue digitally, and several businesses unsure.

International trade

Around 15% of the survey respondents reported trading internationally, with connections spanning a range of global markets. Some local retail businesses import products from countries such as China, Vietnam, India, and Malaysia. Meanwhile, manufacturing and agriculture remain the most active exporters, primarily trading with countries across the Asia-Pacific, a region that continues to show strong demand for Victorian food and fibre products.

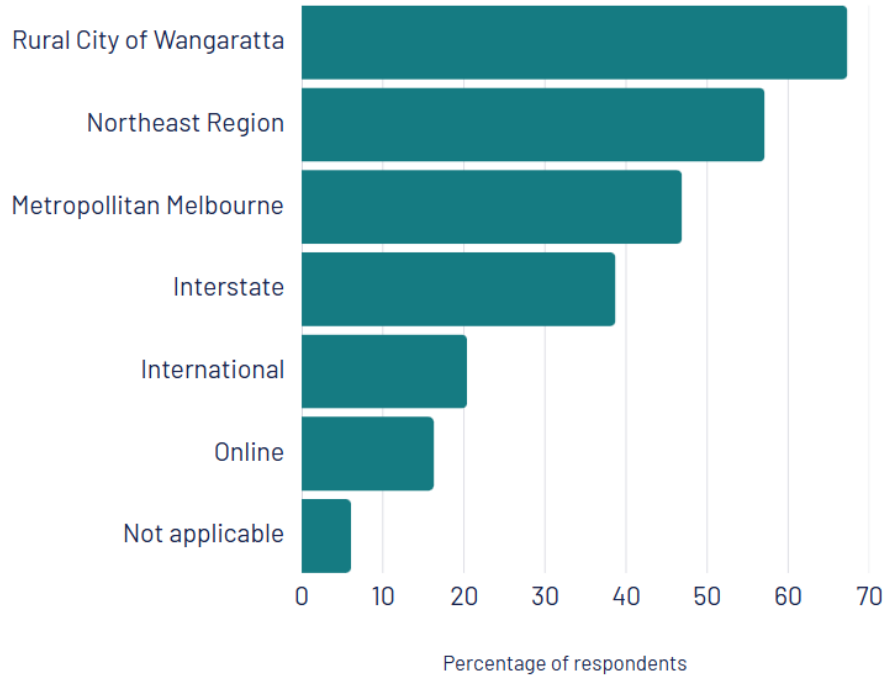


China India Vietnam Malaysia New Zealand

SUPPLY CHAINS

Localities of Suppliers

"Pricing is usually higher in regional areas using smaller suppliers, rather than larger companies and suppliers who are able to be more competitive."



Challenges highlighted for using local suppliers include

- Limited availability
- Price comparisons
- Skills shortages/specialised product and services

Local supply chains remain critical to business operations, but certain industries depend on broader access for scale, variety, or specialised goods.

WORKFORCE

Employee mix in the Rural City of Wangaratta

40% Businesses are looking to increase their staffing numbers in the coming 12 months.

22% Employ apprentices, trainees, school based trainees or support school based experience.

Employment types differ across industries, reflecting the operational needs of each sector. Retail and hospitality rely heavily on casual staff, while manufacturing and professional services typically favour full-time roles indicating the need for a more stable and skilled workforce in those areas. Agriculture shows a more balanced mix, with both full-time and casual staff, likely due to seasonal demands.

Top recruiting channels

Social media, seek and word of mouth were noted as most effective ways to recruit.

Barriers to recruiting and retaining staff



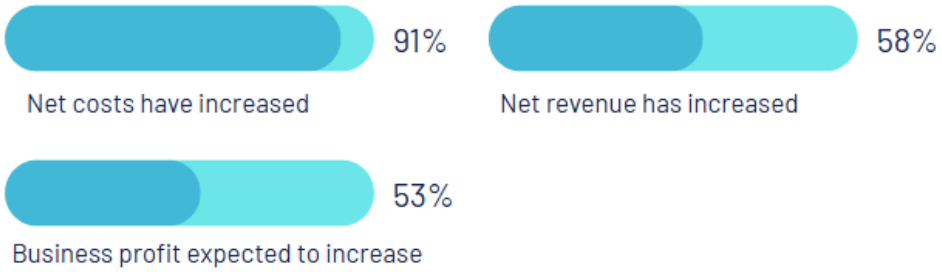
Across all industries, skill level is the most commonly noted barrier to recruitment, followed closely by reliability. Practical attributes such as these outweigh factors like work-life balance, location, or salary expectations, which appear less frequently.

There are some industry-specific nuances:

- Retail and food services appear more affected by competitive market pressures, making it harder to attract and retain staff in a fast-paced, low-margin environment.
- Agriculture and manufacturing place a stronger emphasis on reliability and training, which aligns with the need for consistency and safety in these physically demanding sectors.
- The low mention of benefits expectations and housing or transport suggests that while important, these are not currently seen as major barriers by most businesses — though this may vary by township.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

Cost of running a business over the past 12 months

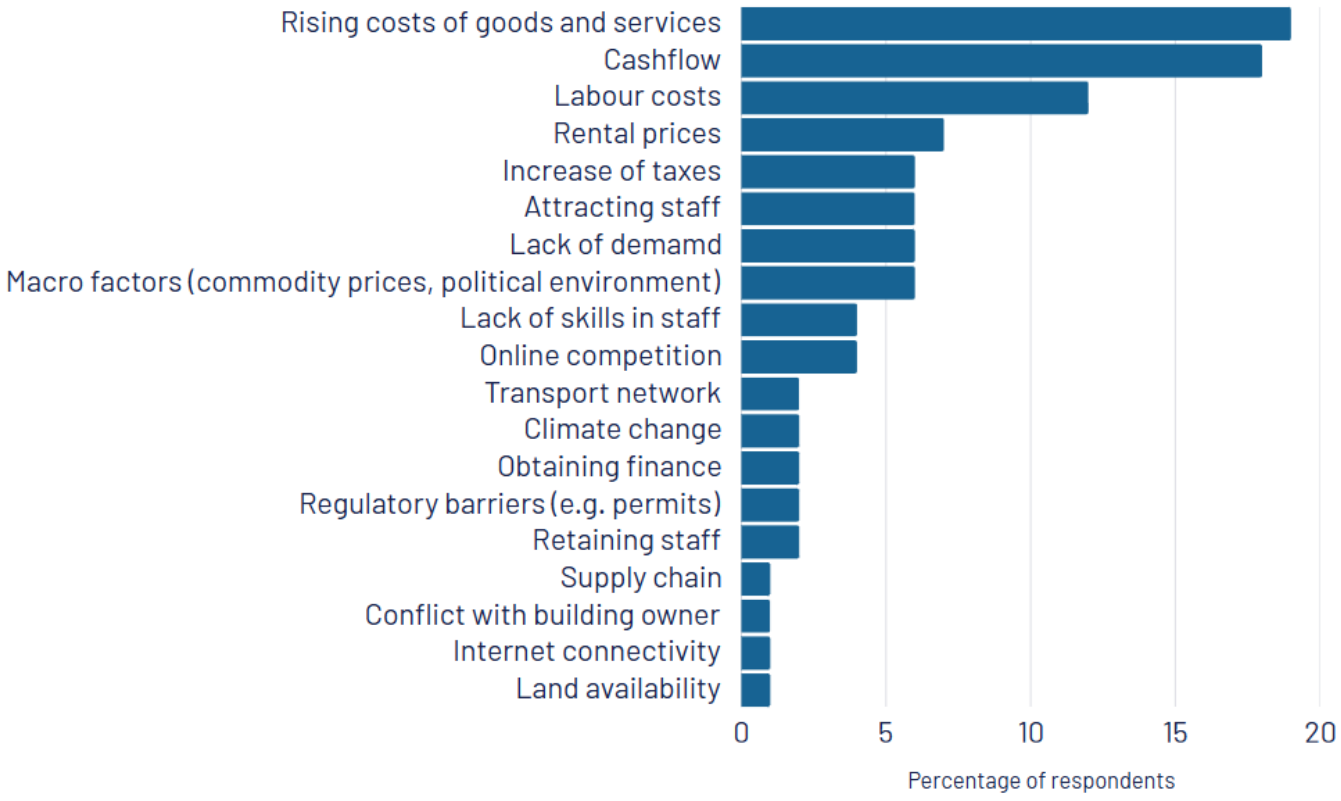


Businesses are under pressure from rising costs, but many are adapting and finding ways to grow. This may also reflect differences across industries — for example, retail and hospitality may be more cost-sensitive, while manufacturing or service-based businesses might be better positioned to absorb or pass on costs.

Retail and accommodation businesses were among the highest reporting their profits would stay the same, suggesting they may be more limited in their ability to absorb or pass on rising costs. These sectors often operate with tight margins and face price sensitivity from customers, which makes it harder to increase prices without affecting demand.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

Challenges faced by business in the Rural City of Wangaratta

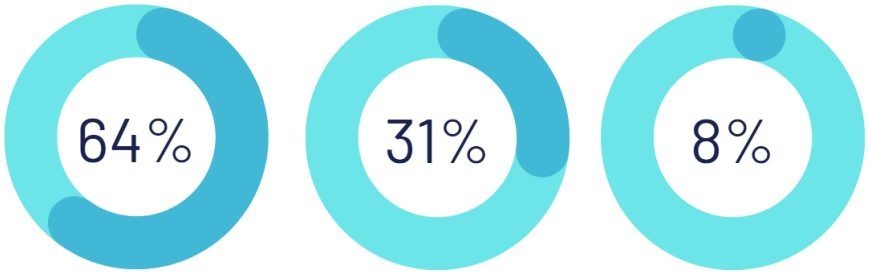


Balancing profitability against rising operating costs and broader cost-of-living pressures is top of mind for many businesses. Nearly 40% identified cost and cashflow as their main concern, making it the most prominent challenge across the board.

Workforce issues are also widespread, though they take different forms — from rising labour costs to difficulties attracting and retaining skilled staff. Retail businesses are under particular pressure, juggling high overheads and growing online competition, while other sectors are grappling with challenges linked to staffing, market demand, or access to resources.

BUSINESS TRAINING NEEDS

Business Continuity and Emergency Planning



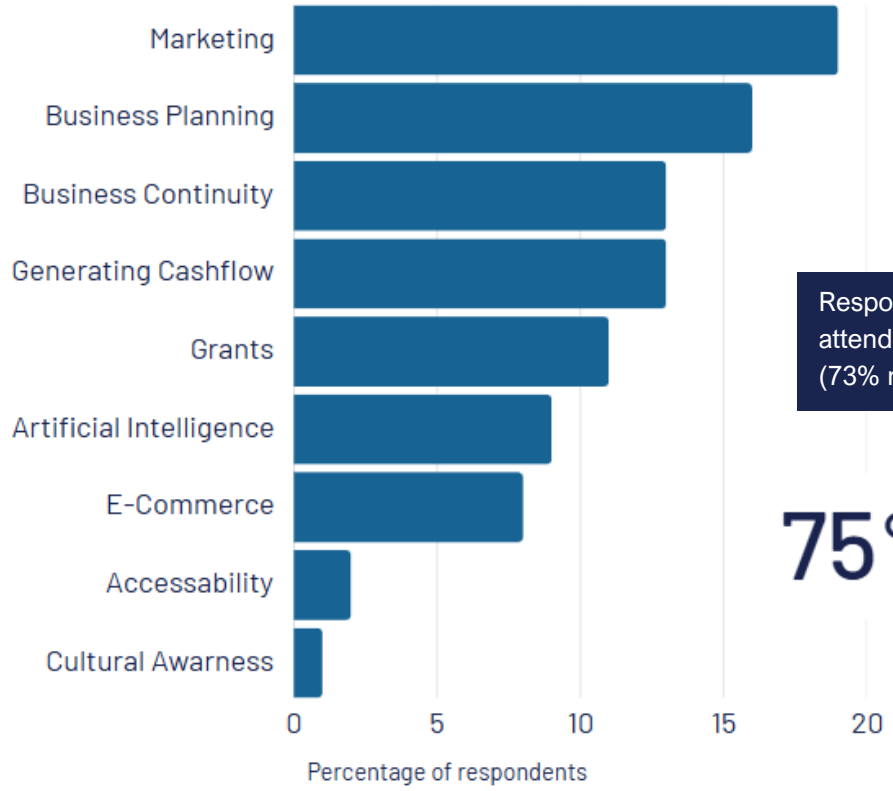
Most businesses do not currently have an emergency management plan in place. While some are not yet engaged in this space, a significant portion have shown interest in learning more, indicating an opportunity to improve preparedness across the business community. A small number of businesses felt that emergency planning wasn't relevant to them, suggesting varied levels of awareness or perceived risk depending on the type of business.

Energy planning



Again, similar to the above, most businesses do not currently have an energy plan in place. However, many have shown interest in learning more, highlighting a clear opportunity to support businesses in exploring energy efficiency, cost savings, and sustainability. A small number felt it wasn't applicable to their operations.

Chosen subjects for future workshops and webinars



Respondents are interested in attending casual networking events (73% responding with yes or maybe)

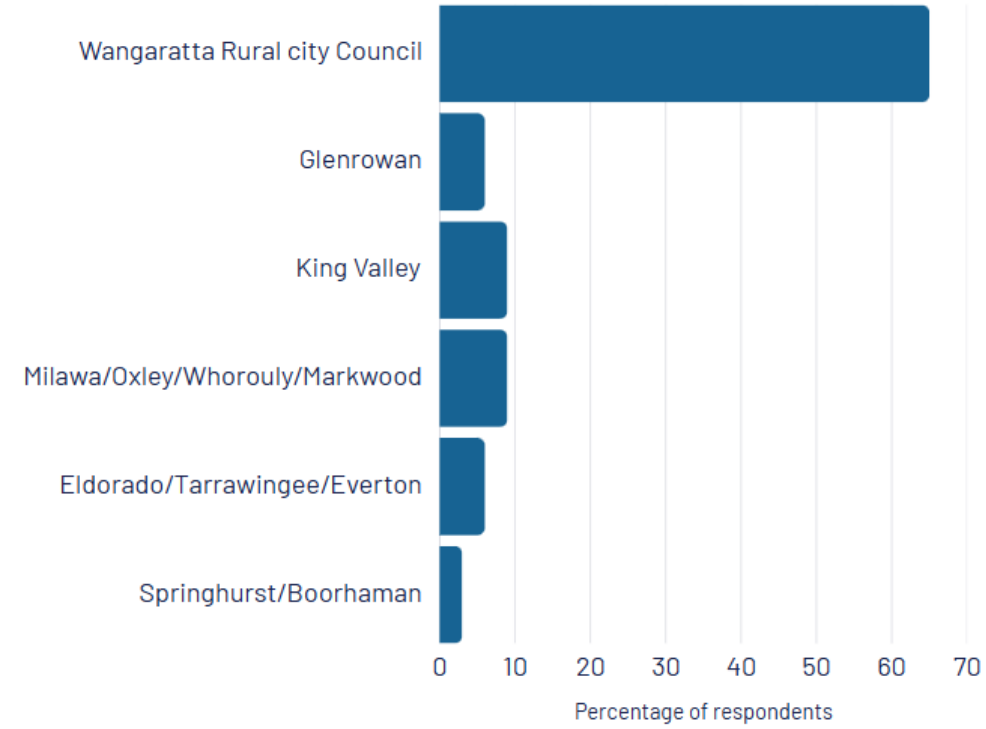
75% **Have some interest in attending general business workshops & webinars (57% yes, 18% maybe)**



Marketing, business planning, and generating cashflow were the most requested workshop topics, reflecting businesses' desire to strengthen fundamentals and navigate current financial pressures. This aligns closely with earlier findings identifying rising costs and cashflow challenges as major concerns.

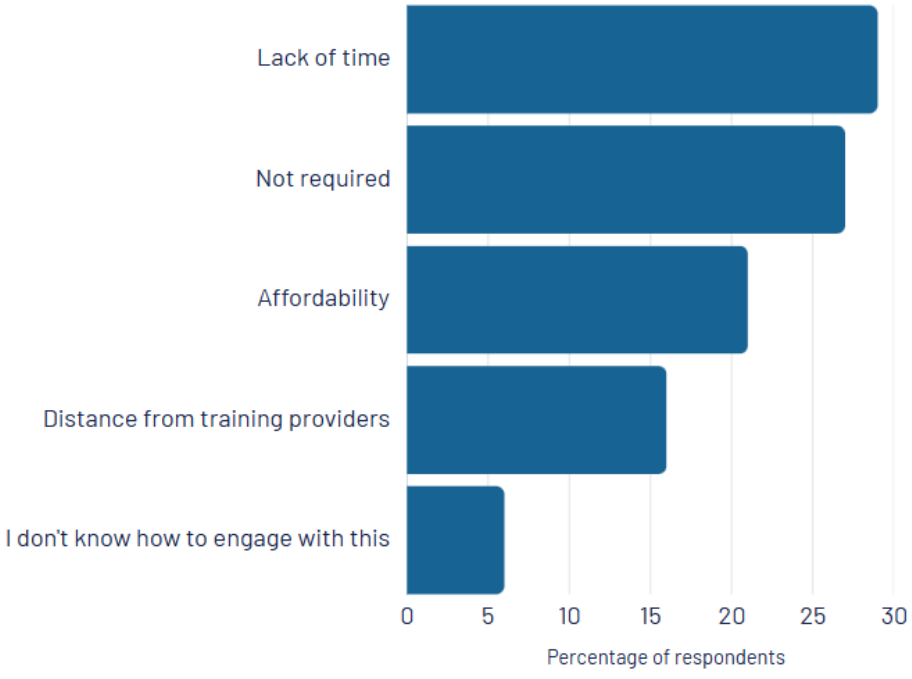
Strong interest in business continuity also reinforces the need for better preparedness, as seen in the low uptake of emergency and energy plans. The growing curiosity around artificial intelligence and e-commerce suggests a clear appetite to explore digital tools and future-focused technologies, even among small businesses.

Best location for workshops

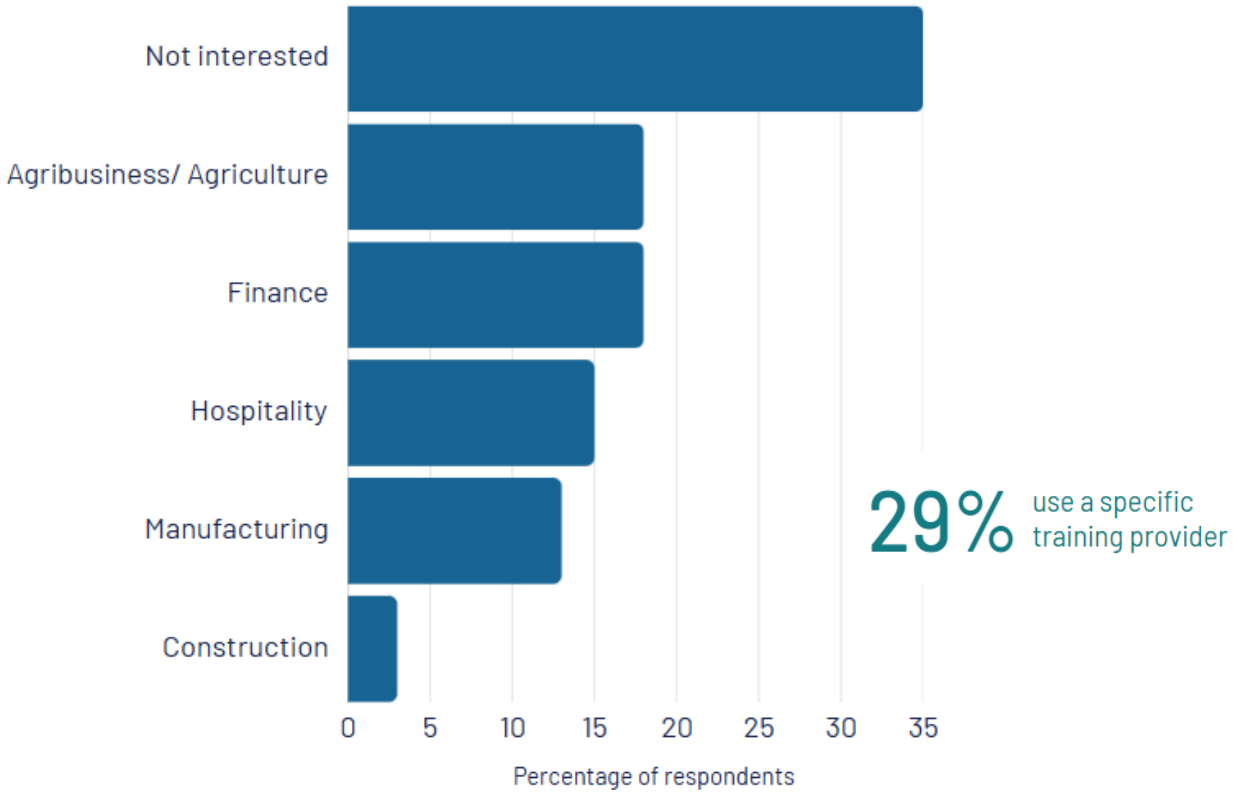


TRAINING PROVIDERS

Barriers to utilising specific training providers



Industry specific training interest areas

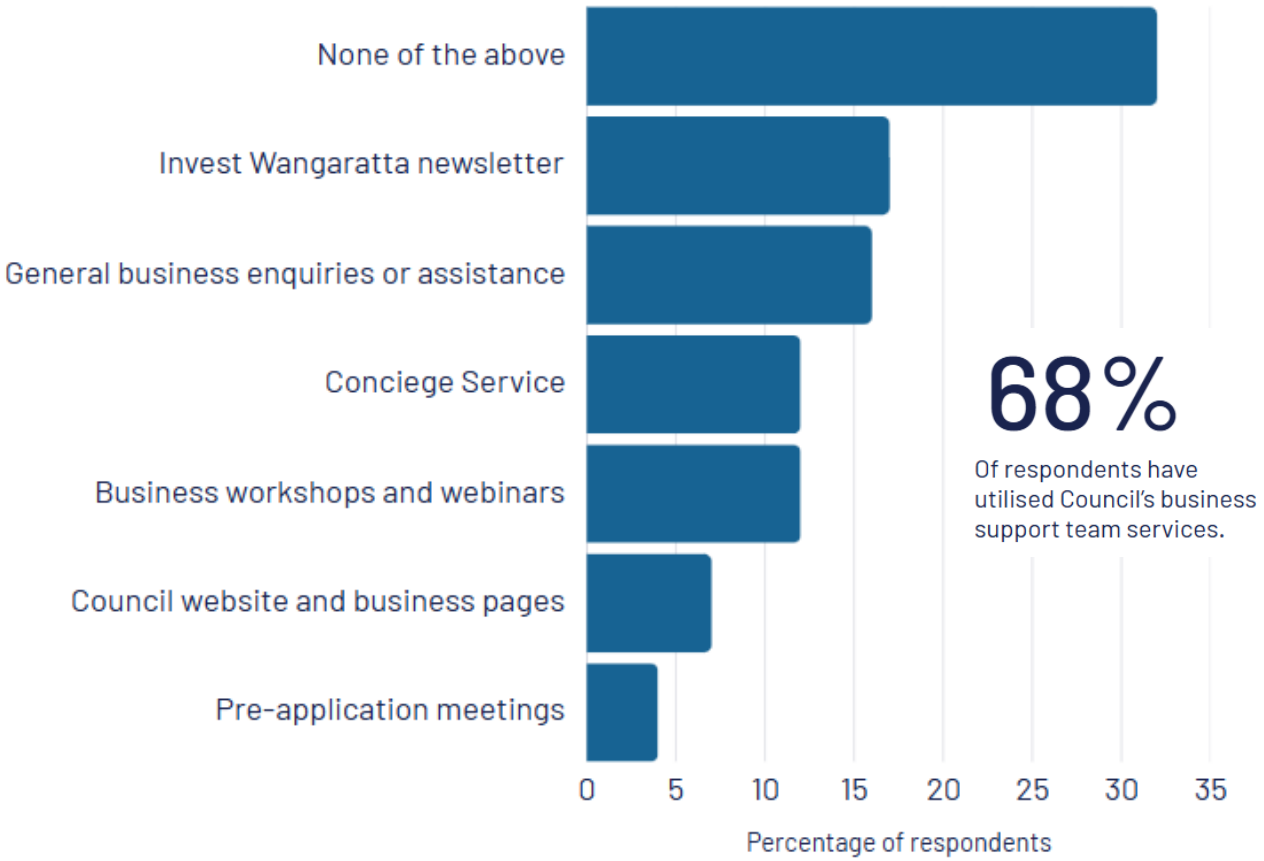


While there was some interest in industry-specific workshops particularly in agribusiness, finance, and manufacturing, a significant number of businesses indicated they were not interested. This may reflect earlier feedback around limited time or financial capacity for additional training. It could also suggest a stronger preference for general business topics like marketing, cashflow, or planning, which are seen as more immediately relevant across sectors.

INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS



CONNECTING WIH COUNCIL SERVICES



Nearly half of respondents hadn't engaged with any of the listed business support services. Among those who had, the newsletter and general enquiries were the most common connection points. This suggests there's an opportunity to increase awareness and accessibility of available support, especially for time-poor businesses.

HOW YOUR FEEDBACK WILL BE ADDRESSED

Your insights have shaped the priorities for our 2025–26 Business Development Program. This includes:

- Practical workshops in marketing, cashflow, continuity planning and digital skills
- Tailored sessions to support key sectors
- Regional delivery of events and workshops and more flexible learning options
- Continued promotion of our business concierge service and export readiness programs

We'll also share updates with you throughout the year to ensure you can see how your feedback is helping shape our actions.