

Smart Economy Business Advisor (SEBA)

2021/22 Annual Report

Background

The Smart Economy Business Advisor (SEBA) contract offers new and existing small businesses in Tauranga a free one-hour meeting with an expert business advisor. This meeting provides the business owner(s) with core business fundamentals including: setting up and structuring a business, strategic planning tools, understanding customer segments, and information about other available support services and networks.

This valuable service ensures the outputs and intent of the Smart Economy Strategy (revised 2012) are delivered, including:

- ensuring organisations offering small business support coordinate their programmes
- investigating establishing additional programmes and activities to increase local business capability and productivity.

The Tauranga Business Chamber acts as the first responder to the business community, providing a hub for business knowledge, resources, and support. This contract delivers an essential first rung on the business support ladder for clients who are yet to meet the eligibility criteria of other Government business support services – which primarily target more established businesses.

The Chamber has two distinct departments that operate semi-independently: our Membership Services Department and our Contracts Department. This independence enables our business support contracts to be delivered with impartiality (as required by our Government contracts) as our advisors ensure clients are aware of all relevant local business support resources and networks.

Key Performance Indicators

Measure	Target	Actual FY22
The number of SEBA advisory meetings (1 to 1) conducted with eligible business owners within a financial year	240	142
The number of SEBA presentations (1 to many) conducted with eligible business owners within a financial year	20	17

Commentary

The 2021/22 financial year was a challenging time for new business start-ups, as we saw an unusual decline in SEBA enquiries. The Covid-19 lockdown from August-October 2021, along with the extended red traffic light setting, caused uncertainties and hesitations for new and pre-revenue businesses. Local labour shortages, higher staff costs, supply chain disruptions and costs, and closed international borders also contributed to the caution.

Other factors impacting SEBA enquiries from historical trends include the Government's additional support to prospective self-employed people and emerging businesses through such agencies as IRD,

MSD, NZTE and MBIE. During the year, the Chamber also heavily promoted the free resources made available at business.govt.nz.

Local businesses of all types and stages reach out to the [Chamber's business support team](#). From there, clients are triaged to the most relevant business support available to them. For instance, the Chamber holds other contracts such as Business Mentors NZ, managerial capability support through the Regional Business Partnership, digital enablement through MBIE, and innovation/R&D support through Callaghan Innovation.

SEBA is promoted through our regular communication channels and events – including our monthly networking events, training workshops, Business Women's Network, Linkt, and our AGM. However, many of our events were cancelled due to the Covid-19 restrictions, particularly in late 2021.

We conducted SEBA presentations for Toi-Ohomai Institute of Technology Year 3 classes, such as Sport and Fitness, and Bachelor of Design (Fashion) – each of these presentations have up to 30 students getting ready to graduate and embark into the business world. These presentations included the fundamentals of how to structure, register, and develop strategic plans before your business starts trading.

We maintain very strong relationships with external stakeholders, such as Tauranga Inland Revenue, NZTE, Citizens Advice Bureau, Toi Ohomai Polytechnic, and Priority One (mainly focusing on innovation/R&D) who all offer their own suite of business support services. Referrals to SEBA are promoted as part of these.

Our contracts (including SEBA) are also promoted to other networks, such as Tauranga Māori Business Association (TMBA). Similarly, we have nurtured the development of Pacific Growth Services (focusing on fostering local Pasifika business) and promoted SEBA.

All SEBA attendees are sent an online feedback form after their meeting. This is an opportunity for attendees to share their experience and select other business support services they would like information on to assist them on their business journey.

Future steps for 2022/23

- The Chamber continues to promote its business support services, especially following our rebrand project to ensure we remain relevant to the changing face of local business
- SEBA will benefit from our successful re-tender of the RBP contract (secured until June 2025), and the digital boost pilot that the Chamber is delivering, reaching a new wave of local businesses
- More targeted advertising of the SEBA service (at our cost)
- Continue to promote SEBA through Chamber meetings and events as Covid-19 restrictions ease
- Continue to work with specific sectors, including partnering with Tourism BOP in preparation for the upcoming peak summer season
- Continue to promote SEBA through Chamber communication channels, and other local networks and business associations.