

Tauranga Business Chamber Report to Tauranga City Council

2023/24 Contracts Report

1. SEBA

The Smart Economy Business Advisor (SEBA) contract offers new and existing small businesses in Tauranga a free support from 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 service contributes to the outputs and intent of the Smart Economy Strategy (revised 2012):

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

This contract provides 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. It leverages the other impartial business support services that the Chamber delivers as it creates a pathway to be eligible for further business support. Our advisors also ensure clients are aware of all relevant local business support resources and relevant wider networks available.

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	113
The number of SEBA presentations (1-to-many) conducted with eligible business owners within a financial year	20	20

Commentary

The SEBA contract recognises that the Chamber provides a public good service in responding to a wide range of business enquiries. Although the KPI tracks 1:1 hour meetings, we also respond to phone calls and emails from aspiring business owners who may not wish to meet for an hour and may be addressed quickly via email or phone – akin to the great service provided by the Citizen Advice Bureau.

2023 was the tail-end of high salary/wage offerings due to worker shortages. Redundancies have since rolled out across most sectors and industries, and demand for SEBA has correspondingly picked up as people decide to go out on their own - whether by choice or necessity. 2023 calendar year also featured the role out of the previous Government's business support offerings, such as Digital Boost facilitation scheme. The Chamber was encouraging people to take advantage of this service while it was free and facilitated for a limited time. These facilitated sessions are pivotal for people who prefer to learn from a person, rather than watching a screen. In total, nearly 400 local businesses completed the Digital Boost facilitation scheme through the Chamber, which was made up of a 40-hour series of facilitated sessions, boosting their digital enablement.

SEBA is promoted through our regular communication channels and events – including our regular e-newsletters, social media, monthly networking events, training workshops, Business Women’s Network, Linkt, and our AGM. We have invested in a range of paid adverts, editorials and social media campaigns. We also continue to promote our wider business support contracts (both Government and Council) to other local networks, such as the Tauranga Māori Business Association (TMBA), Tauranga Inland Revenue, NZTE, Citizens Advice Bureau, and Toi Ohomai Polytechnic. Similarly, we have nurtured the development of Pacific Growth Services, which focuses on fostering local Pasifika businesses.

Although now closed, Ministry of Social Development provided a similar service for their flexi-wage scheme for a period. The 2023 year was a challenging time for new business start-ups. A number of issues provided caution to new businesses, including the rising costs of doing business and greater economic uncertainty, such as supply chain disruptions and costs.

Future steps for 2024/25

- TCC has agreed to allow us to include our business support enquiries that we receive via emails and phone calls. This will more fairly reflect our wider public good services that we provide
- We promote the service to school leavers/graduate students of Secondary Schools (Year 12/13 Business & Commerce Departments) and University of Waikato
- Continue our targeted paid advertising of the SEBA service (at our cost).
- Promote the caution of blindly following social media ‘influencers’ who can promote either irrelevant tips (e.g. relevant to an overseas jurisdiction) or even illegal practices.

Business support offerings are constantly changing (as directed by the new Government), and we're continuing to promote SEBA as a first step where businesses are not yet eligible for other business support offerings. The Chamber is well-known as the hub of business support, connecting businesses with the right support across local offerings and government agencies. We're also boosting our advertising and promotions with local partner networks to gain further reach of this free and independent services, which is important for the participants to know there are no strings attached to this service and inputting into other sales pipelines. This is a public good service and we do not seek to gain members or other business from delivering this service.

The Regional Business Partnership (RBP) - funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) – has launched a new initiative to subsidise new business owners to complete training sessions on fundamentals of starting a business. While this is separate to SEBA, it will impact on some of SEBA’s numbers for FY25 as it will provide specific skills training to new business owners, whereas SEBA is general guidance.

2. City Centre Business Support – 12-month Pilot Project

The goal was to provide business capability and skill support to eligible businesses in the city centre to help them get through the immediate disruptions as part of the city centre revitalisation programme. It was modelled on the highly successful Covid-19 business support programme, funded by MBIE, which provided free training to small & medium business owners. The Covid-19 programme was oversubscribed and we expected this city centre programme to be similarly oversubscribed.

Scope

Eligibility requirements:

1. Within City Centre boundary (some on Cameron Road also requested help, but were ineligible)
2. GST registered and actively trading
3. Fewer than 50 employees

Process

We modelled the process based on successful Covid-19 business support programme. We met 1:1 with the individual first, provided an action plan based on their needs, included links for additional resources (e.g. IRD, Business.govt.nz, industry bodies, our SEBA if they are new etc.). We then recommended they register for a group training session.

We had expert facilitators deliver training sessions across three topics:

1. Digital marketing and social media
2. Playing strategically (re strategizing your business)
3. AI - artificial intelligence

The businesses who we connected with received both an action plan and a 4-hour session with an expert. This included taught skills and takeaway resources that they can implement into their business immediately.

Challenges

The cooling macro economy meant more business owners lacked capacity to prioritise training, as they were manning the store/cafe/bar to reduce staff wage costs and manage cashflow. This was exemplified by how we supported Downtown Tauranga to run a crime & safety workshop with NZ Police, but that did not proceed due to low registrations. It was also a challenge to reach business owner/smanagers, despite using various comms channels and hand delivering flyers throughout the 12-month period. We also spent time supporting Downtown Tauranga to help them plan and execute their additional \$10,000 mentoring fund. Some businesses also didn't want to participate in a programme that Council was part of.

KPIs

Based on the success of the Covid-19 business support programme, we set ourselves stretch KPIs to meet 150 individual business owners and run 10 group training sessions. We completed:

Business registrations = 42

Discovery sessions (1:1 sessions with an expert navigator) = 38

Action Plans provided to businesses (summary of business, gaps and challenges, recommendations) = 38

Group presentations (insights into workshops – facilitator presentations) = 3

Facilitated training workshop attendances = 24

Facilitated training workshop sessions (completed) = 10

Plenty of customer feedback on either the SEBA and City Centre Support Pilot are available on request.

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Tauranga Business Chamber

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