

# **Central Region Employment Summit**

6 April 2009

## **Participant and Workshop Feedback**

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## **Regional Employment Summit Participant Feedback**

### **1. Participant Snapshot Survey Results**

Of summit attendees, 67 completed the participant snapshot survey provided. The majority of those who attended were from Palmerston North city (47%), while the most common size of business represented employed 0-5 full-time employees. A mix of industry sectors were represented; those in business services were most predominant.

Participants surveyed were asked to identify what areas they most wanted to discuss. Over a third identified staffing (employer obligations, human resource management or other) as an important area. Marketing (sales, promotion, market research and development, strategy) also scored highly with one in four businesses wanting to explore this area.

When asked to identify what would help their business move forward, participants rated the following most highly:

- new market identification & development,
- increased business efficiency;
- and training/skill development for their workforce

The top three skill areas identified as helpful to improving business performance were strategic planning, customer service and supervisory/management capabilities.

A breakdown of survey responses is available in Appendix One.

### **2. Workshop Feedback**

Participants were broken into ten smaller workshop groups. Each group discussed the following questions over a forty minute period:

- What do you want to talk about today? (identifying key issues/topics)
- Why are these issues important?
- What skills or resources would help your business make the most of future opportunities?
- What (constructive) advice or ideas would you like to give to the agencies here today?

Group responses have been collated into common themes; economic information; leadership and management capability; retaining and up skilling employees; attracting skills; improving business

capability; infrastructure, government investment and compliance; perception and attitude; and networking and collaboration. Consolidated feedback received is as follows:

Key Themes	Feedback Received	Workshop Groups
Economic Information	<p>Participants wanted the ‘big picture’ to get an understanding of where recession is at, how it is affecting our region (and industries) and where to focus their energies. They felt ongoing regular, relevant and focused information would help inform their business decisions. Comments received suggest this is not happening as effectively as it could at a regional level. Participants also noted the importance of educating younger generations in particular about the impacts of an economic downturn.</p>	One, Two, Three, Four, Eight, Nine
Leadership and Management Capability	<p>Comments received emphasized the importance of good leadership and management capability to lead businesses through these challenging times. Some participants felt quality skills in these areas were in short supply in the region.</p>	One, Five
Retaining and Upskilling Employees	<p>Many groups discussed retaining and investing in the further development of existing staff. Conversations ranged from the importance of keeping and building skills to needed support for employment retention incentives for SMEs.</p> <p>Employees were identified by some groups as the greatest assets a business has. Participants acknowledged that it is easier to retain than to retrain, and that up skilling employees will lead to improved business efficiency. Numeracy and literacy skills were identified as core skills to develop, as well as improved work ethics and time management skills. Sharing ownership and solving of the issues a business is facing with staff was suggested as a way of promoting ongoing skill development and employee loyalty.</p> <p>It was reported that many apprentices are being laid off – we need to keep developing these skills so we don’t have a future shortage. Reserve Force industry partnerships or ITO’s acting as employers were suggested solutions. Other suggestions included partnering with tertiary providers to provide training for future workplace needs and replacing our aging workforce.</p> <p>Participants would also like to see a mechanism for employers to stay in</p>	One, Three, Five, Six, Seven, Ten

	<p>touch with lost employees or to facilitate alternative interim employment during quiet periods. This would also help employers who are still recruiting to connect with potential employees.</p> <p>If redundancies are unavoidable, participants would like to see government/tertiary provider support for the up skilling of shed staff in preparation for an economic upturn, or alternative solutions that keep people in gainful work/activity in the community.</p>	
Attracting Skills	<p>A number of groups observed skill shortages still exist in some industries and felt attracting people to live and work in the region is important. Shortages were observed particularly in professional service roles (accounting, management). Those presenting their views felt that skill shortages were more acute in rural areas.</p> <p>Anecdotal evidence shared and recent gains in net migration figures indicate a number of skilled ex-pat NZers are returning to the country – some participants felt we need a mechanism to identify and attract these and other migrant skills to our region (others wanted to limit immigration). A number of groups observed education around the value of diversity and migrant experience was needed. Others identified a need to retain students within the region.</p> <p>It was suggested that local councils and agencies collaborate to promote each area and the wider region.</p>	One, Two, Seven, Nine, Ten
Business Capability	<p>Some participants felt there was a lack of support for SMEs to enable their businesses to leap forward and improve. Others felt that businesses needed better communication about what free training and support resources were available – a one stop shop or website were suggested solutions.</p> <p>Financial literacy (budgeting, cashflow, forecasting), business management, strategic planning, business health checks, business mentors, improving business efficiency, strategies for improving sales or identifying/accessing new markets and workplace health and safety were identified as areas of need.</p> <p>Participants observed that by working collectively with other businesses in similar industries that could collectively identify areas for improved</p>	One, Three, Four, Five, Seven,

	efficiency or opportunity. Some felt this was particularly important for the manufacturing sector.	
Infrastructure/ Government Spending/ Compliance	<p>Questions were raised as to whether taxes are being invested in the right areas. Some participants identified technology (in particular broadband capability) as a barrier to business growth and development. Others (mostly from the Horowhenua region) identified transport and driver licensing as barriers for some people in getting to work/jobs.</p> <p>Participants argued that government services are too beauracratc and that greater responsiveness and accountability is needed. They felt central and local government have a responsibility to find solutions to keep people made redundant in gainful work/activity in the community.</p> <p>Concern was also expressed about central and local government procurement policies and how fair these are to NZ industry/businesses. They also felt local government policies/processes create unnecessary delays and heighten compliance costs.</p>	Two, Five, Eight, Nine, Ten
Perception and Attitudes	<p>Many groups felt the media takes a lead role in influencing business and consumer confidence. They felt the media needs to provide a more positive outlook, sharing success stories and relevant information.</p> <p>Participants also acknowledged the importance of business leaders/owners remaining positive.</p>	Three, Four, Six, Seven, Ten
Networking and Collaboration	Groups recognized networking as an important way of connecting with other businesses, resources, ideas and opportunities. A number of participants suggested greater collaboration amongst businesses and between businesses and public agencies would be beneficial and improve information sharing.	Two, Four, Five, Eight

### 3. Bright Ideas

Participants were asked to suggest ideas on tactics businesses or public agencies could best address issues raised throughout the day. Comments on surveys were also recorded.

Feedback received included suggestions on better communicating support/resources available to local employers, advice to local and central government agencies, and opportunities for utilizing or developing skills in the region. It echoed the themes raised in the workshop groups.

#### *Skills/training*

1. Utilise military leave resettlement. Benefits both orgs and skilled ex soldiers. Keeps them in the region.
2. Teach leadership and management
3. More support for apprentices
4. A major promotion of all training providers. Massey, IPC, UCOL, Te Wananga. Joint Event.

#### *Business support*

5. Suggest 'roadshow' – booth type (as in careers expo) – have people from each agency – accounting services – banking options – inventory management – technology services – copier services – employment advice/supplies – ISP – e-marketing – international marketing – courier/transport options – etc etc. (Not many employers present at summit)
6. Hold a business owners summit
7. Run a business owners summit focused on strategies to get ahead
8. Cashflow. Businesses to pay accounts on time – 20<sup>th</sup> month
9. Need to develop a new way of doing business
10. Back to basics
11. Mindset of our business leaders is critical

#### *Agency/Govt Advice*

12. Lift OHS focus/requirements by law. Companies to be more conscious – involve staff in this to encourage them to see work safe complete. JSAs – job safety analysis and work on risk
13. Workbridge Inc. Job retention services and funding for employers. 0508 858 858
14. Lobby local govt – councils to review their restrictive rules i.e. time for consent. Encourage quick work turn around
15. Cycleways to promote economic opportunities Feilding/Ashhurst/Linton
16. Immigration must go up. We need people. Make it easier for rich foreigners to retire here.
17. Promote and develop the key economic drivers for this region – servicing and agriculture

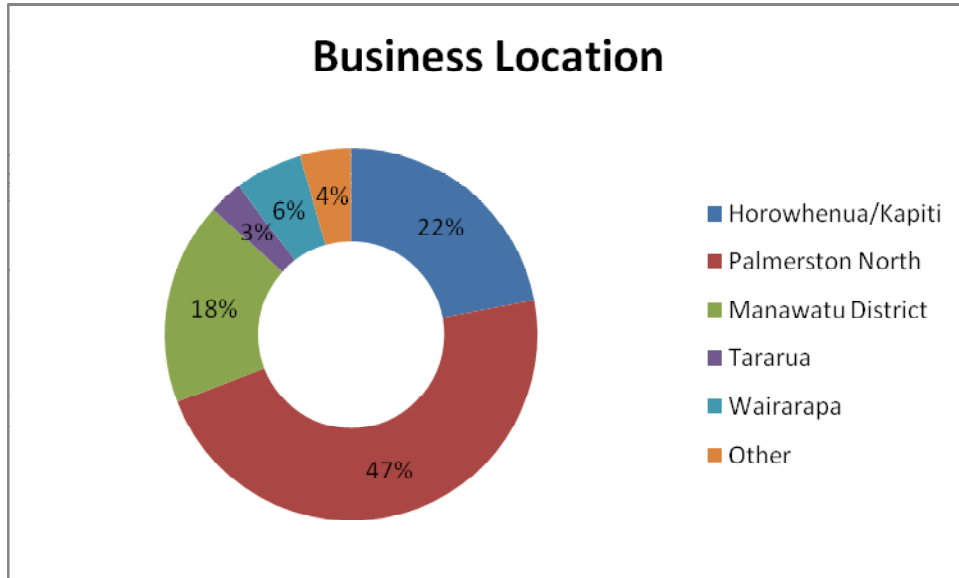
18. Government Procurement. This regional job summit should send a clear signal to Wayne Mapp that when the Defence uniform tenders come up next year – that clothing companies in our region e.g. Swazi, Academy Apparel should be given preference (they are very competitive). In this way we will actually retain these jobs in our region.
19. Put a 'currency' on workplace training when it comes to tendering out business from local/central Govt. Make it a consideration for a successful tender!
20. Better co-ordination at a regional level
21. Tax relief
22. Reduce compliance costs
23. MSD support to employees made redundant should be broadened, e.g. income support, training, advice, relocation, counseling

#### *Attitude*

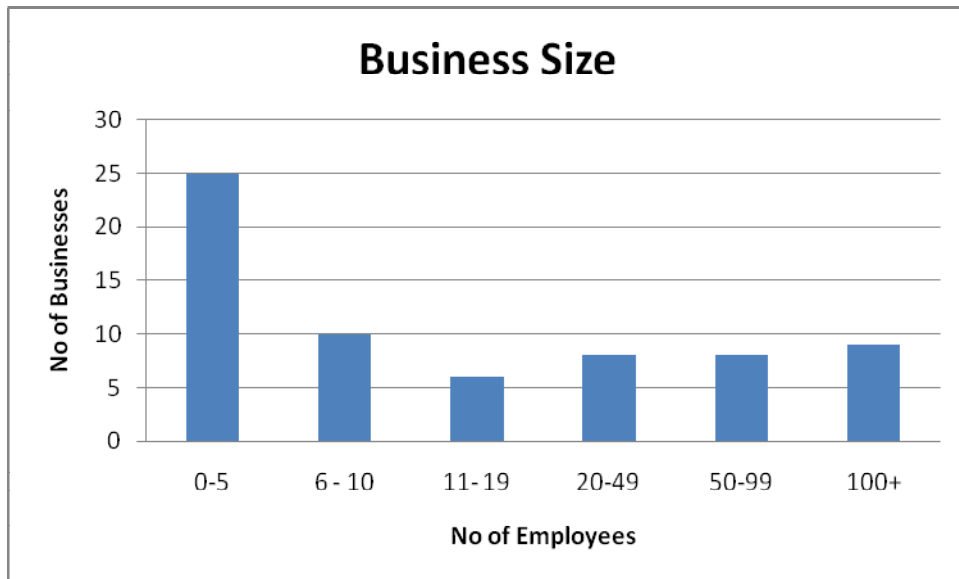
24. Get the media to change the doom and gloom. Perception – more good news stories in our region.
25. It's time to stop taking and start giving! Working for the greater good and not just for the profit line on the balance sheet

## Appendix A – Participant Snapshot Survey Responses

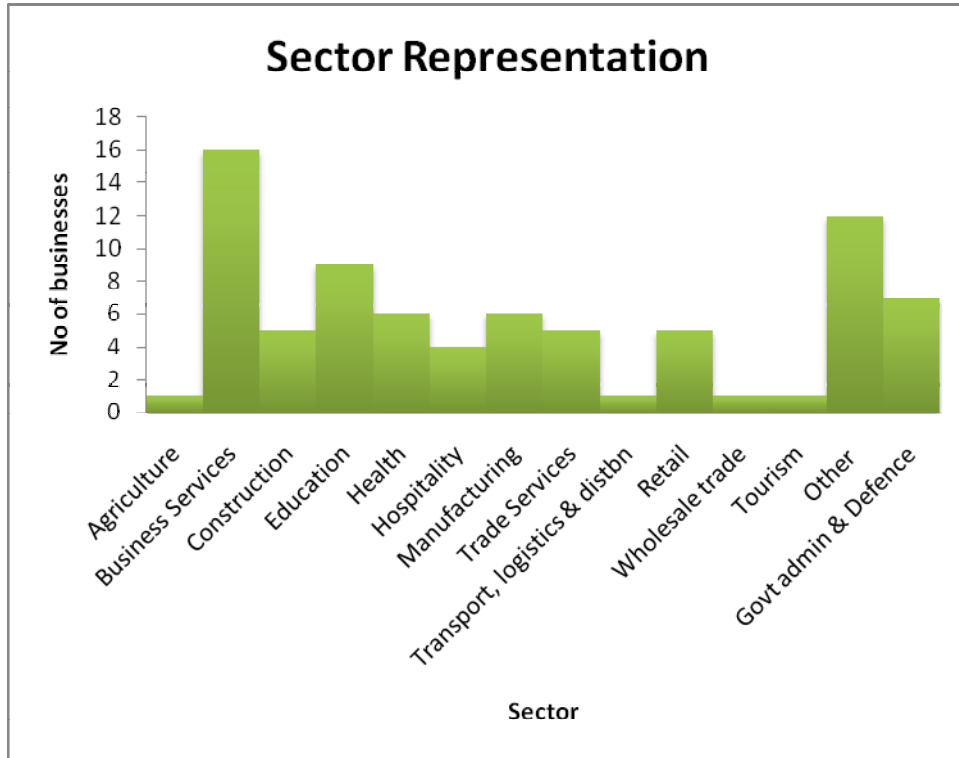
1. Where is your business located?



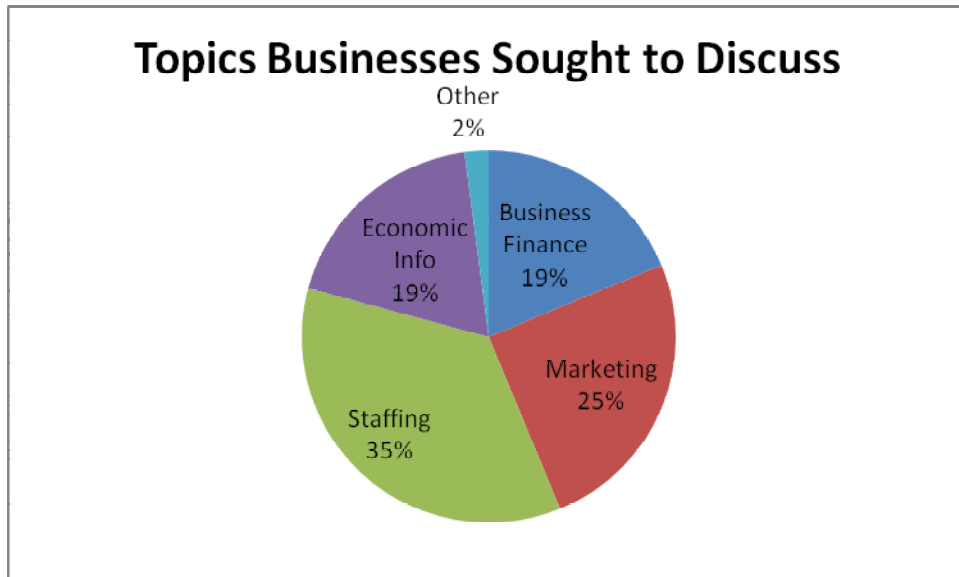
2. How many full-time employees does your business have?



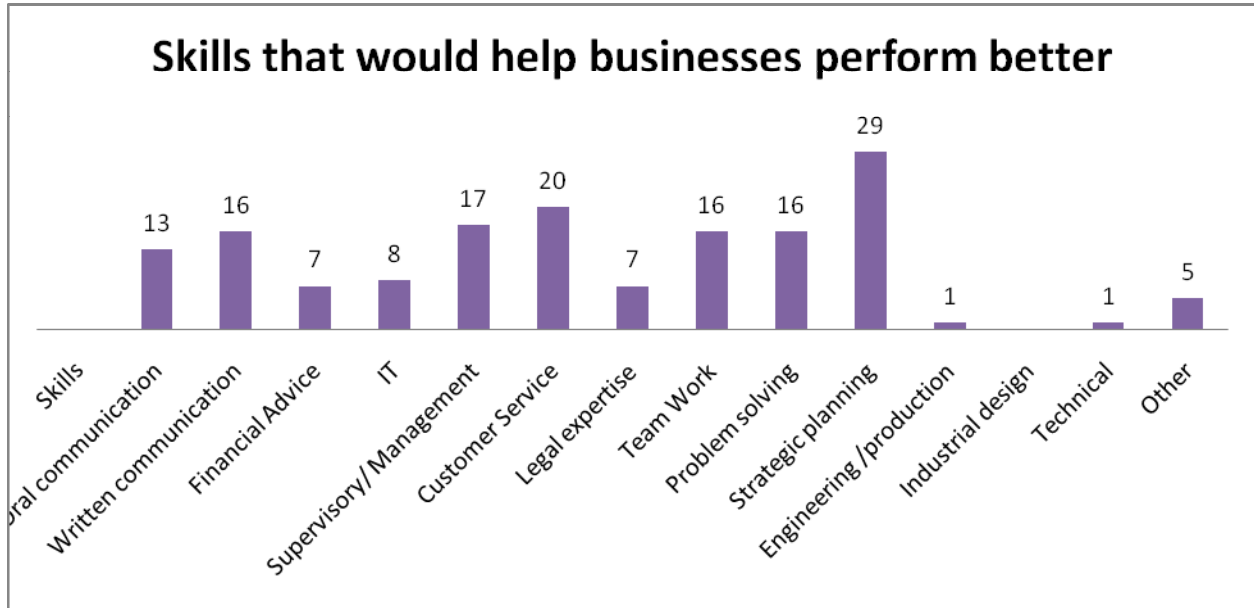
3. Which sector best describes your business?



4. Which of these areas do you want to discuss today?



5. What skills would help your business and employees perform better?



6. What would help your business move forward?

