

Kings County Business Training Needs Survey

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August 2011

In partnership with:

Eastern Kings Chamber of Commerce
Western Kings Board of Trade
Central Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Survey

The purpose of this survey was to assess the training needs and preferences of the businesses (and, to a lesser extent, non-profit organizations) operating in Kings County. ACSBE, the Eastern Kings Chamber of Commerce, the Central Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce, and the Western Kings Board of Trade will use the findings from this survey as a tool for developing high-impact business support services for our entrepreneurs. Being able to respond to the demand for training with a more accurate proposition allows ACSBE and its partners to deliver solutions that better enable businesses to contribute to the growth of our economy.

Methods

A carefully designed questionnaire was administered online through www.surveymonkey.com to a population of employees and owners of various businesses and organizations. Of the approximately 1,500 entities that received an invitation to participate in the survey, 259 organizations took part, equating to a participation rate of just over 17%. The participation was voluntary and offered no financial incentive, except through a raffle of several prizes including gift certificates at local food service and tourism operations. These prizes were on average valued at \$100 each. Given this method of data collection, it is important to bear in mind the possibility of a self-selection bias.

Through a number of multiple choice, ranking, and short answer questions, the survey paints an accurate picture of the businesses and organizations in the Annapolis Valley. The first part of the survey extrapolates general data, including the age of the organizations, the number of workers they employ, and the type of industry in which they operate. The second part of the survey inquires about the various challenges that these organizations face, both in the short and the long term. The survey asks the respondents to indicate what type of training would help them overcome their challenges.

Findings

The main findings of the survey included the following:

- **Location of Operations:** Respondents were located as follows: Berwick (21.5% of respondents), Kentville (16%), Wolfville (12%), Greenwood (6%), Kingston (5%), and Canning (4%).
- **Who are the Respondents?** 72% are owners or partners of a business; 13% are employees of a business; 9% are employees of a non-profit or government organization
- **Age of Organizations:** 20% of existing businesses and organizations have been operating for 1-5 years; 30% have been operating for 5-15 years; and 46% have been in operations for over 15; only 3.5% have been around for less than 1 year.
- **Number of Full- and Part-time Employees:** 49% of organizations employ 1-9 full-time employees, (in addition to the owner/partner); 30% employ 0 full-time employees (these are run by the respondent); 14% employ 10-25 full-time employees; 6% employ over 50 full-time employees; and

2% employ 26-49 full-time employees. With respect to part-time employment, 57% of organizations on average employ 1-9 part-time employees; 31% employ 0 part-time employees; 8% employ 10-25 part-time employees; 2% employ over 50 part-time employees; and 2% employ 26-49 part-time employees.

- **Industry or Sector of Businesses:** The largest category of organizations (24%) is in Retail; 12% are in Professional Services; 12% are in Business Services. 10% were in manufacturing, 10% were in tourism, and 9% were in agriculture. The rest of the organizations fall fairly equally (ranging from 8% to 10%) into all other business categories.
- **Plan for Growth:** An overwhelming 80% of organizations indicated that they would like to grow their operations, yet only 24% said that they have a very clear plan of how to achieve their goal.
- **Biggest Challenges and Support Needed**
The top four challenges were indicated as the following:
 1. Human Resources, Staffing & Staff training (for 18% of respondents)
 2. Input and Operating Costs, i.e. fuel, labour (12%)
 3. Marketing (11%)
 4. Regulations, Taxes, and Government Support (10%)

The top four types of support desired to address these challenges are:

 1. Lobbying and Government Support (19%)
 2. Not Sure, Nothing, or Other (14%)
 3. Marketing, Market Research, and Sales Training (14%)
 4. Better Accessibility to Training, i.e. timing, location, and funding (10%)
- **Type of training sought for employees:**
The top five categories included:
 1. Not sure, Nothing, Don't know (16%)
 2. Sector-specific training (12%)
 3. Project and General Management (9%)
 4. General and Social Media Marketing (6%)
 5. Customer Relations and Sales (6%).
- **Type of training that respondents will pay for and will not miss:**
 1. 24% of respondents said that they don't know, are not sure, or need no training
 2. General and Social Media Marketing training (13% of respondents)
 3. Sector-specific training (11%)
 4. Customer Relations and Sales training (8%)
 5. Technology-related training (7%)
- **Obstacles to pursue training:** 28% of the respondents see accessibility of training (timing, location, and affordability issues) as a major obstacle to pursue training.
- **Type of functions that organizations find most difficult to manage are:**
 1. Planning for growth (average difficulty score of 2.01 out of 3)

2. Human resources including recruitment, hiring, firing, and turnover (2.00/3)
 3. Accessing new markets (1.99/3)
 4. Promotion and advertising (1.96/3)
 5. Market research (1.96/3).
- **Amount spent on training:** 34% of respondents spent \$1-999 on training in the last 12 months; 33% spent \$1,000-4,999; 20% spent \$0.
 - **Indicators of satisfaction with training:** The top three most important indicators were having a knowledgeable presenter; leaving training with information and ideas specific to the respondents' business; and having an interesting presenter. Slightly less important were creating relationships that could help the businesses in the long term and having a high level of interaction between the presenter and the learners. Even less important was leaving training sessions with lots of handouts.
 - **If respondents are to pay for training, the training must be:**
 1. Relevant to their business needs (for 28% of respondents)
 2. Implementable and results-oriented (23%)
 3. Informative, worthwhile, and unavailable elsewhere (14%)
 4. Run locally and be overall accessible (5%)
 - **Day and time of training:** Wednesday and Tuesday were indicated at the most convenient days for training with 25% and 23% of respondents, respectively. Following was Monday with 13.5% and Friday with 11%. Having training in the morning (9am-noon) was preferred by 52% of respondents; 25.5% preferred the afternoon (1pm-4:30pm); 12.5% preferred evenings (6-9pm); and 7% prefer weekends.
 - **Training method preference:** The three most preferred methods were interactive workshops, one-on-one consultation, and on-site training. Less preferred were online training and non-interactive workshops. The least preferred method was do-it yourself workbooks.

Conclusion and next steps

The underlying goal of this survey – and most others like it – is simple: to help ACSBE and its partners create the conditions under which Kings County entrepreneurs can thrive. Entrepreneurs – like the ones who completed this survey – help drive our economy and our quality of life.

The Acadia Centre for Social and Business Entrepreneurship – along with its economic development partners – will continue to work diligently to address the business development issues identified in these surveys. Although there were arguably no major surprises in the survey, this data is vitally important due to its depth and its currency. Most importantly, many of the survey respondents indicated it was okay for the survey administrators to follow-up with them in order to assist in finding customized solutions to their business growth challenges. We will do exactly that.

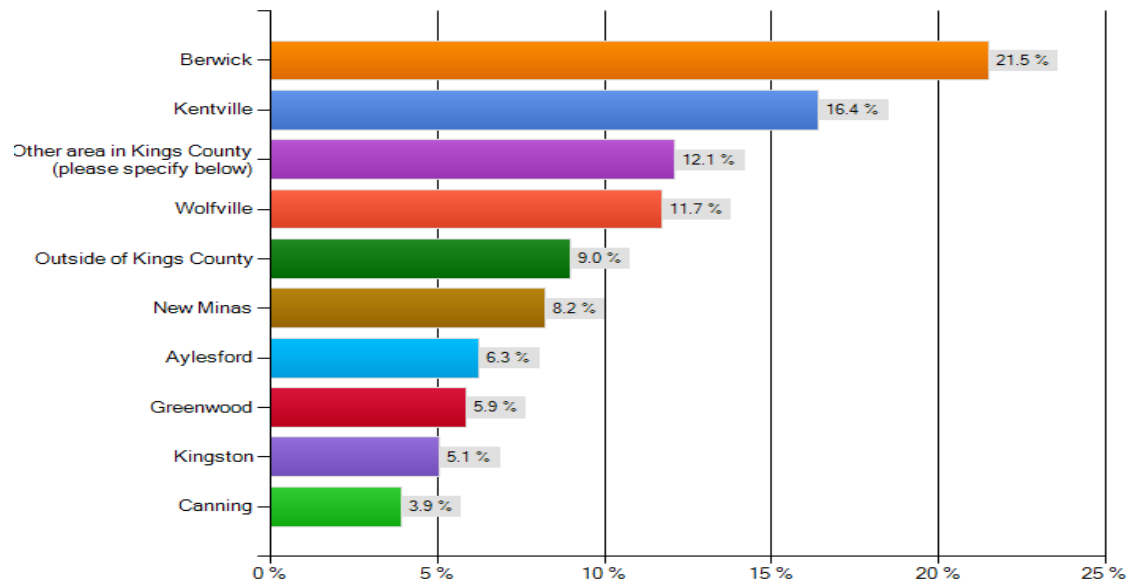
Thank you to everyone who completed the survey – your input is invaluable. If you have any questions, please contact Joel Stoddart at joel.stoddart@acadiiau.ca.

Charts and Graphs

• Location of the operations

The chart below suggests that the three top communities to host businesses and organizations are Berwick (21.5% of business or organizations), Kentville (16%), and Wolfville (12%). The three communities least likely to host businesses and organizations are: Greenwood (6% or business and organizations), Kingston (5%), and Canning (4%).

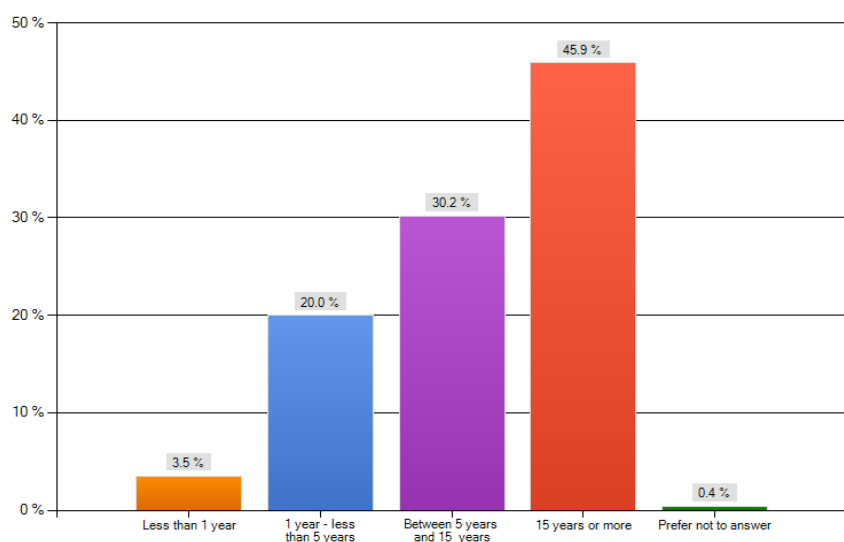
Where is your business or organization located? (if more than one apply, please choose whichever option fits best)



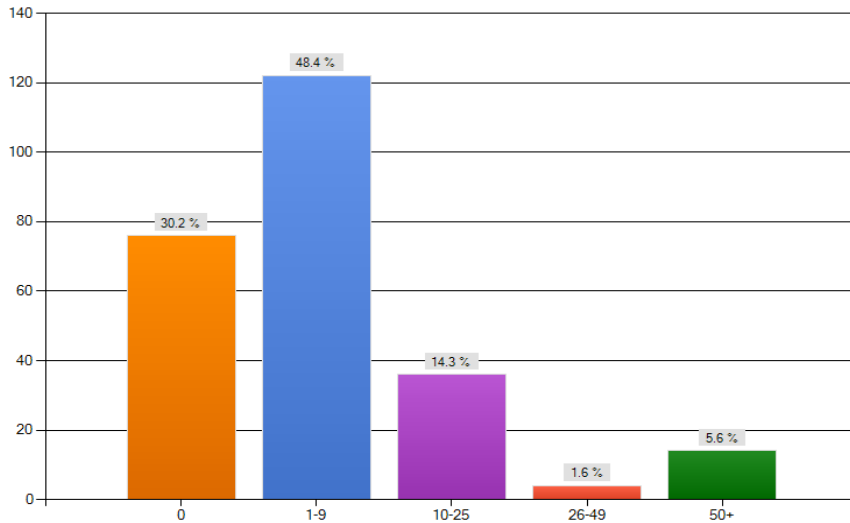
• Business age

The chart on the right shows that 20% of existing businesses and organizations have been operating for 1-5 years; 30.2% have been operating for 5-15 years; and 46% have been in operations for over 15. About 20% of organizations have been operating between 1 and 5 years, and only 3.5% have been around for less than 1 year.

For how long has your business or organization (or the business/organization you work in) been operating?



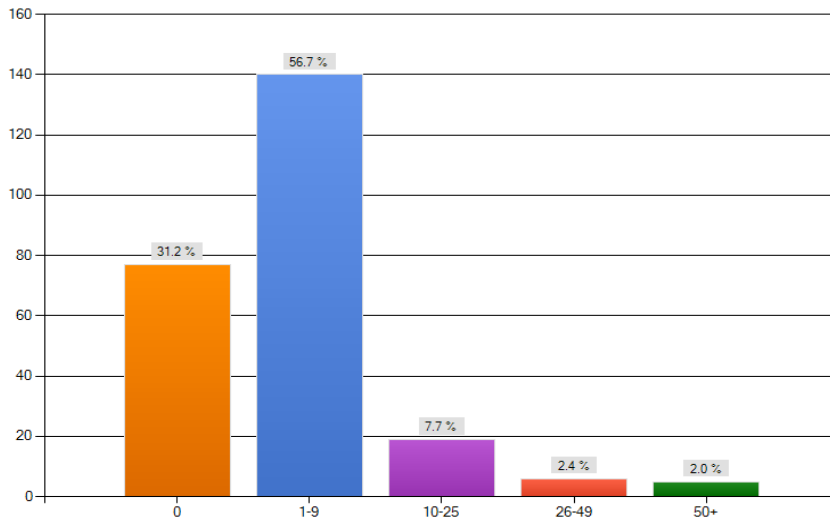
Not including yourself, how many FULL-TIME employees does your business or organization have, on average?



● **# of Full-time employees**

According to the chart on the left, 48.4% of organizations employ 1-9 full-time employees, not including the respondent. The second largest group comprising 30.2% of organizations employ no full-time employees, operating solo. About 14.3% of the organizations employ 10-25 full-time employees, followed by 5.6% organizations employing over 50 full-time employees, and 1.6% employing 26-49 full-time employees.

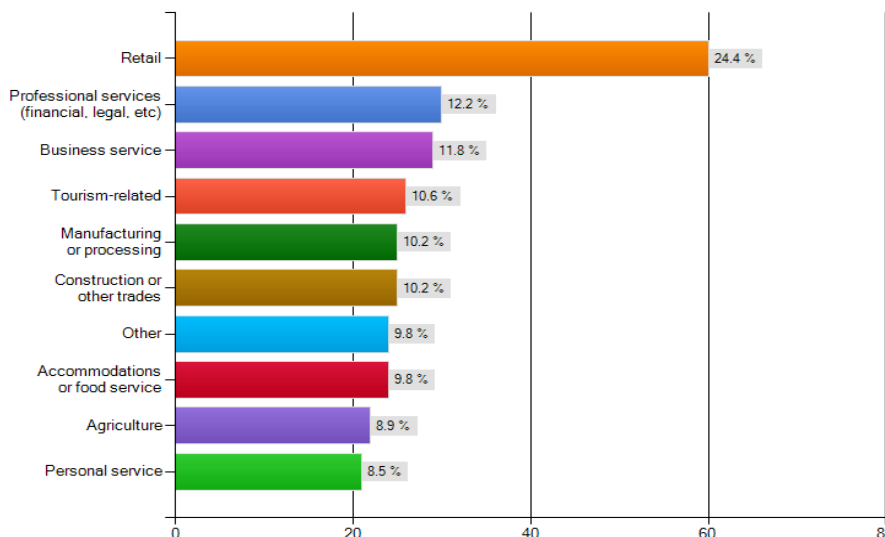
Not including yourself, how many PART-TIME employees does your business or organization have, on average?



● **# of Part-time employees**

The chart on the left shows that 56.7% of organizations on average employ 1-9 part-time employees. The second largest group comprising 31.2% of organizations employs no part-time employees. About 7.7% of organizations employ 10-25 part-time employees; 2.4% of organizations employ over 50 part-time employees; and 1.6% employ 26-49 part-time employees.

Which of the following represent the type of business or organization you work in? (choose all that apply)



● **Type of business**

The chart on the left indicates that 24.4% of the organizations classify themselves as being in the business of Retail. The second largest group (12.2%) is in Professional Services, and the third largest group (11.8%) is in Business Services. The rest of the organizations fall fairly equally (ranging from 8.5% to 10.6%) into all other business categories (i.e. Tourism, Agriculture, Personal Service, etc.)

- **Biggest challenges**

According to the graph below, 18% of organizations indicated that Human Resources, Staffing & Staff training was one of their biggest challenges; 12% said the same about Input and Operating Costs (fuel, labour, etc), while 11% suggested that one of their biggest challenges is Marketing. Interestingly, 10% of the respondents suggested that one of their biggest challenges was Regulations, Taxes, and Government Support.

What are the 2-3 biggest challenges facing your business or organization right now?



- **Outside support wanted to overcome challenges**

Based on the chart below, 19% of organizations indicated that they would like to have Intervention through Lobbying and Government Support (this is consistent with the observation above where 10% of respondents identified Regulations, Taxes & Government Support as one of the major challenges); 14% said Not Sure, Nothing, or Other about the type of support they require; another 14% said that they need support with Marketing, Market Research, and Sales Training; finally, 10% wished for Better Accessibility to Training (timing, location, and funding)

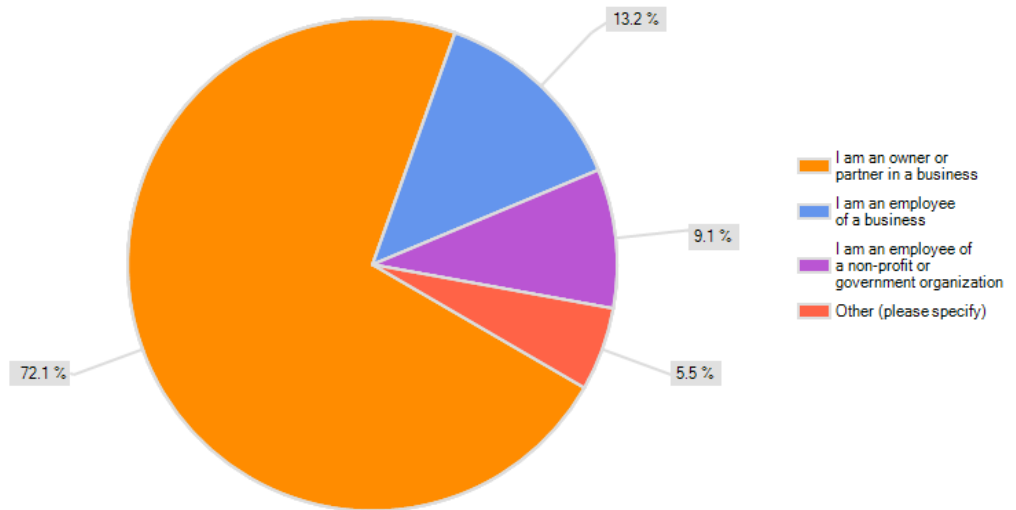
What outside would you like to have to help you overcome those challenges?



- Respondent's role in business or organization**

According to the chart on the right, 72.1% of respondents indicated themselves as the owner or partner of a business. The second largest group, 13.2%, indicated themselves as an employee of a business; 9.1% stated that they are an employee of a non-profit or government organization, while 5.5% indicated themselves as other (board member, volunteer, etc.).

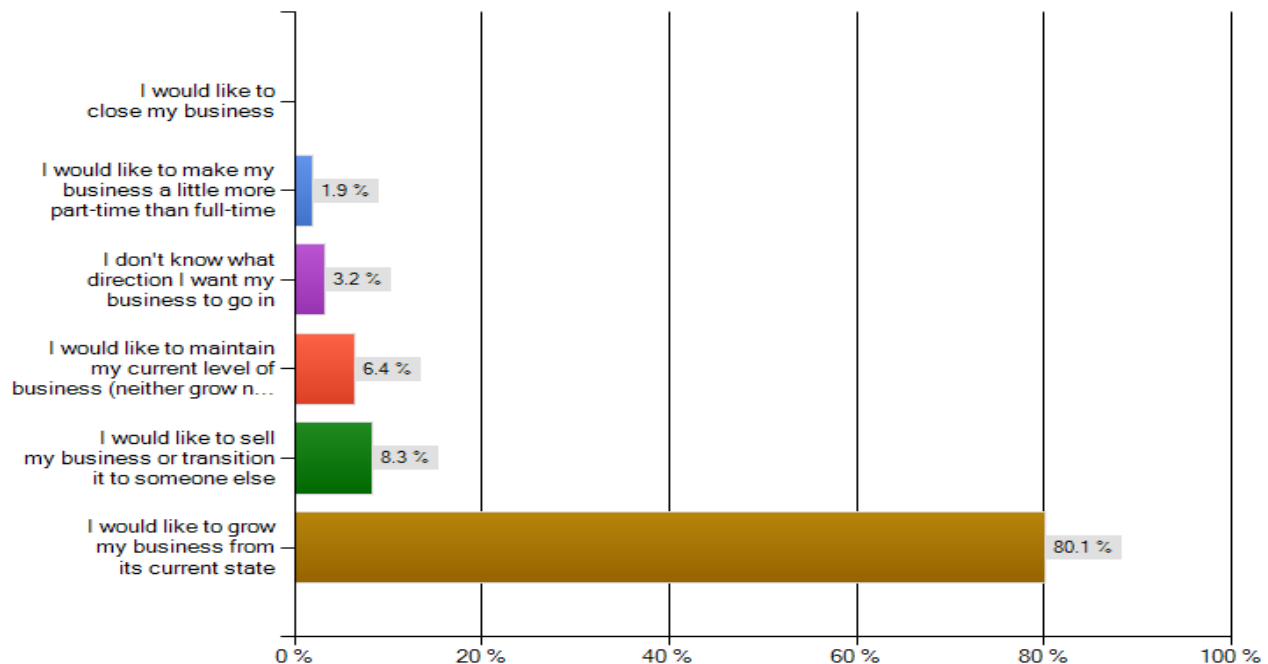
Which of the following best describes your current position?



- Goal of the Organization**

According to the chart below, an overwhelming majority of respondents, 80.1% indicated that they would like to grow their business from its current state; 6.3% would like to sell or transition their business to someone else; 6.4% would prefer to maintain the current position; and 1.9% would like to make their business more part-time than full-time.

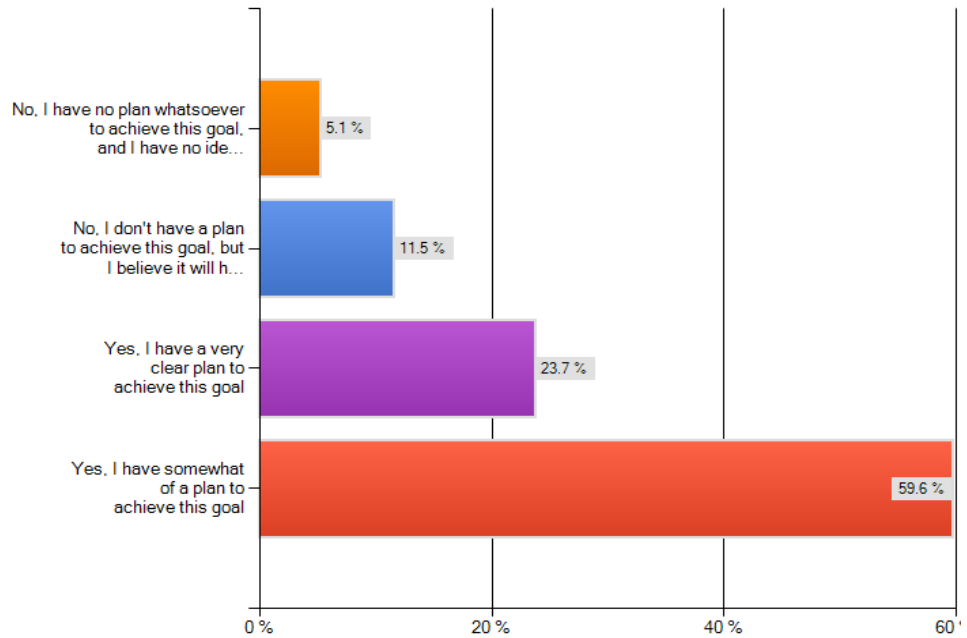
Owner/operators: which of the following statements best represents your goal for the business in the next 12 months?



- **Plan to accomplish goal in Question 9**

According to the chart on the right, 59.6% of respondents indicated that they have somewhat of a plan to achieve their goal; 23.7% said that they have a very clear plan to achieve their goal; 11.5% said that they don't have a plan, but believe it will happen anyway; finally, 5.1% said that they have no plan whatsoever and have no idea what to expect in the next 12 months.

Owner/operators: based on your answer to the previous question, do you have a plan to accomplish this goal over the next 12 months?



- **Training sought for employees and obstacles to obtain it**

According to the chart below, the five largest categories of responses pertaining to the type of training sought for employees include: Not sure, Nothing, Don't know (16%), Sector-specific Training (12%); Project and General Management (9%); General and Social Media Marketing (6%); and Customer Relations and Sales (6%). Considering this data, and more specifically the high percentage of respondents indicating that they don't know, are not sure, or require no training, is indicative of the following problem: it is difficult to know what one doesn't know. Exacerbating this issue is another finding that 28% of the respondents see accessibility of training (timing, location, and funding issues) as a major obstacle to pursue training.

What type of training do you wish you or your employees could pursue right now?



- **Type of training that respondents are willing to pay for and will not miss**

According to the chart below, 24% of respondents said that they don't know, are not sure, or need no training; 13% indicated that they will pay for and will not miss General and Social Media Marketing training; 11% said the same about Sector-specific training; 8% indicated interest in Customer Relations and Sales training; and 7% said that they will pay for and not miss Technology-related training.

The type of training I would be willing to pay for and absolutely NOT miss right now would be...



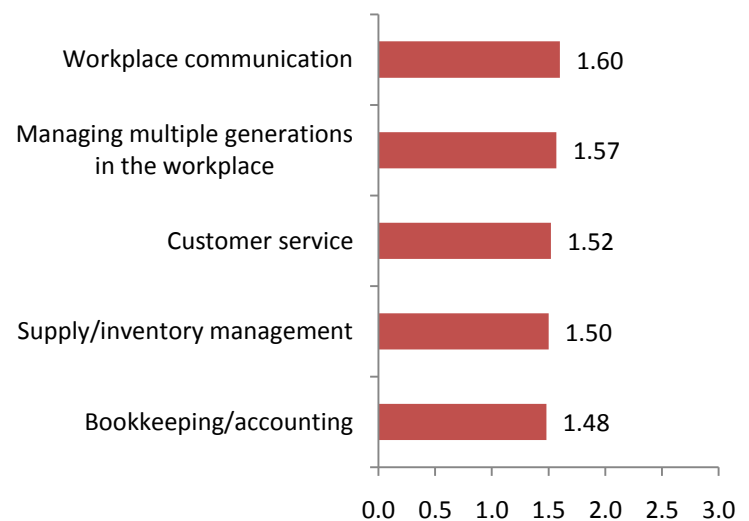
- **Type of functions that organizations experience most difficulty managing**

According to the chart below (on the left side), organizations experience most difficulty with managing the following functions: planning for growth (average difficulty score of 2.01/3), human resources including recruitment, hiring, firing, and turnover (2.00/3), accessing new markets (1.99/3), promotion and advertising (1.96/3), and market research (1.96/3). According to the chart on the right, organizations experience least difficulty with managing the following functions: bookkeeping/accounting (1.48/3), supply/inventory management (1.50/3), customer service (1.52/3), managing multiple generations in the workplace (1.57/3), and workplace communication (1.60/3).

5 business management functions ranked most difficult to manage



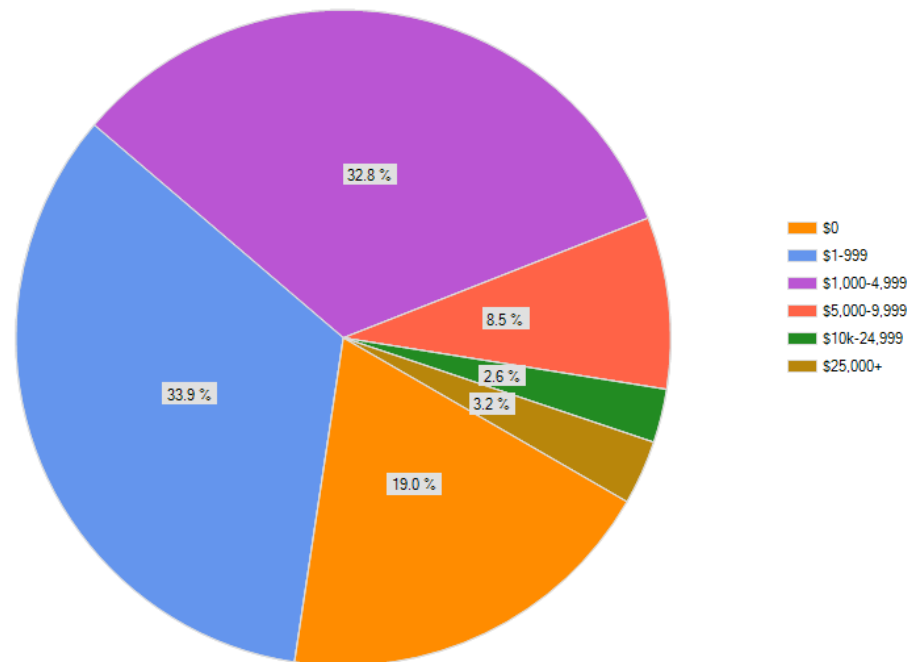
5 business management functions ranked least difficult to manage



- **Amount spent on training in the last 12 months**

According to the chart on the right, the largest group, 33.9% of respondents, indicated that they spent \$1-999 on training for themselves and their employees; the second largest group, 32.8% of respondents, spent \$1,000-4,999; interestingly, the third largest group, 19.6% of respondents spent \$0; 8.5% spent \$5,000-9,999; only 3.2% spent \$10,000-24,999; and only 2.6% spent \$25,000+

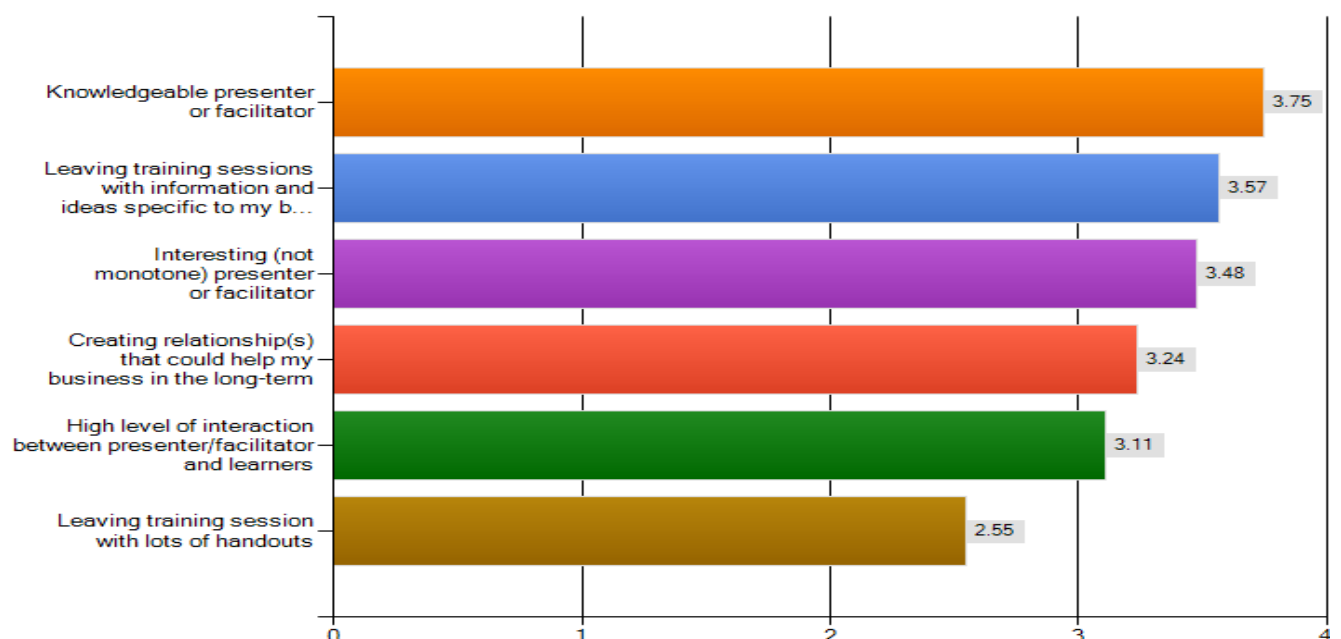
How much do you estimate your business spent on training (for you and your employees) IN THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS?



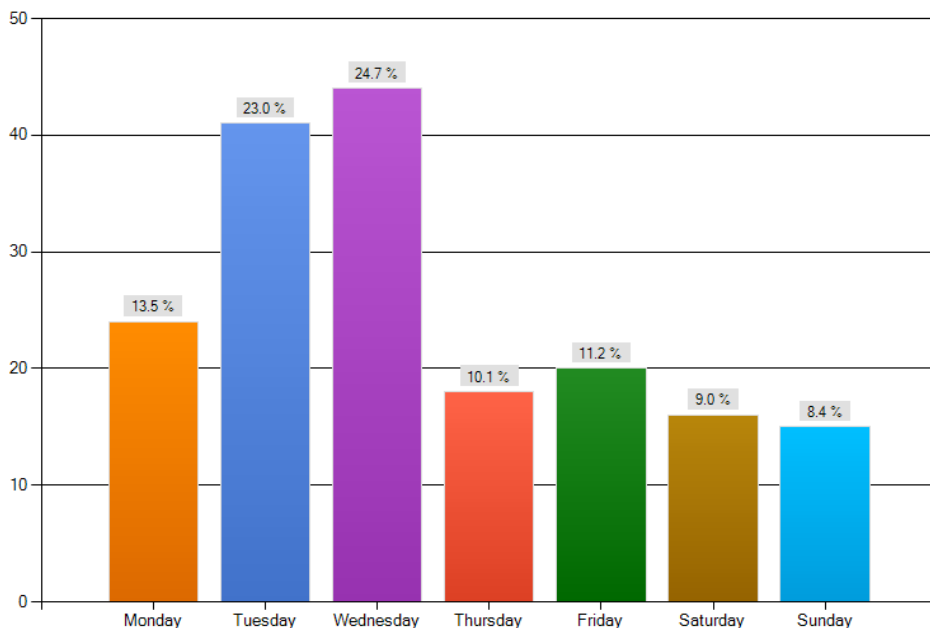
- **Indicators of satisfaction with training**

According to the chart below, the degree of satisfaction with training indicator ranked highest was having a knowledgeable presenter (3.75/4). Second highest was leaving training sessions with information and ideas specific to the respondents' business (3.57/4). Having an interesting presenter was valued at 3.48/4. Creating relationships that could help the business in the long term received 3.24/4. The high level of interaction between presenter and learners got 3.11/4; and leaving training sessions with lots of handouts received a mere 2.55/4.

Please rank the importance of each of the following indicators in determining your overall satisfaction with a particular training session/program.



Thinking about yourself (and not about your whole organization/business), which day of the week is generally most convenient for you to attend or engage in training?



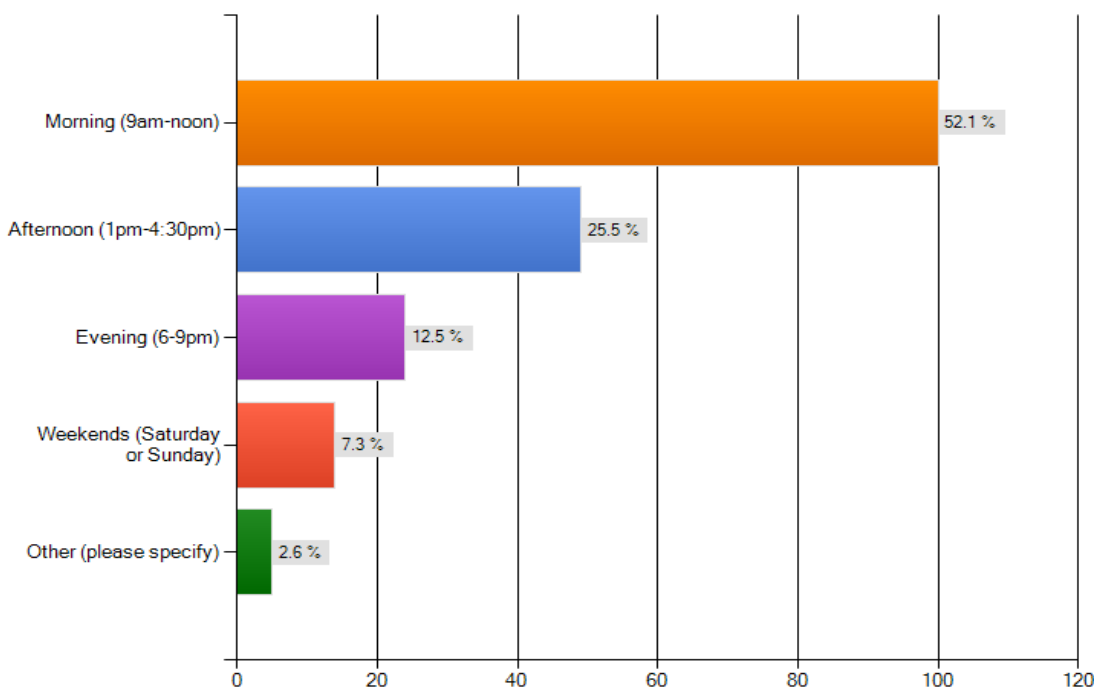
- Day of the week most convenient for training**

Looking at the chart on the left, Wednesday and Tuesday were indicated at the most convenient days for training with 24.7% and 23.0%, respectively. Following was Monday with 13.5% of respondents and Friday with 11.2% of respondents.

- Time of the day most convenient for training**

According to the chart on the right, 52.1% indicated preference for training in the morning (9am-noon); 25.5% prefer the afternoon (1pm-4:30pm); 12.5% prefer evenings (6-9pm); and 7.3% prefer weekends; the comments expressed by 2.6% that selected "other" can be summarized in a quote by one of the respondents: "It is not important what day of the week and what time of the day you offer your trainings. It is more important that the training topic is interesting enough to lure people to the session and that it is well in advance advertised."

If you had to choose JUST ONE, which time of the day would you most prefer to attend or engage in training?



- **Paid training must be:**

According to the chart below, if the respondents were to pay for training, 28% indicated that it must be relevant to their business needs; 23% said that it must be implementable and results-oriented; 14% said that the training must be informative, worthwhile, and unavailable elsewhere; lastly, 5% indicated that the training must be run locally and be overall accessible.

Please complete this sentence: If I'm going to pay to attend any kind of training in the next year, it absolutely MUST...



- **Training method preference**

Looking at the chart below, interactive workshops received the highest level of preference (3.26/4) among respondents. One-on-one consultation was a runner up with 3.02/4; this was followed with on-site training (2.88/4). Online training such as webinars and simulations received 2.6/4; non-interactive workshops got 2.51/4, and do-it yourself workbooks were valued at mere 2.3/4.

For each of the following training/assistance/education methods, please indicate the extent to which you prefer that method.

