



Small Business Workforce Support Program

Post-Program Survey Results

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Data Analysis Prepared by Marsh Canada Ltd.

Small Business Workforce Support Program Overview

Objective

On August 2, 2016, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) Council allocated \$15 Million in funding to support small businesses affected by the 2016 Horse River Wildfire. From this funding, a \$5 million *Small Business Workforce Support Program* was created to directly respond to the most urgent needs identified by our small business community. The objective of the Program was to help small business employers by providing timely financial assistance to offset costs related to attracting, hiring, and keeping employees.

Minimum Requirements

The following Program eligibility minimum requirements had to be met:

- Be a small business, defined as having 1 – 49 employees¹
- Have an active 'resident' RMWB business license
 - exceptions for businesses located on First Nations' lands
 - equivalents outlined in Alberta's Provincial Acts
- Was operating within the RMWB on May 3, 2016
- Filed a tax return within the last three years reporting business income with the Canada Revenue Agency
- Completed the survey questions in the application

Program Information

The Program ran from October 19, 2016 to December 16, 2016. A total of 692 applicants met the Program eligibility minimum requirements and received funding, which ranged from \$5,386 to \$7,916.

Post-Program Survey Information

A post-Program survey was sent to each of the 692 recipients of Program funding. A total of 313 recipients responded to the survey. The intent of the survey was to both better understand how the Program funding was utilized and gain information to help shape continued supports for small businesses across the region.

The survey was active from April 14, 2017 to April 30, 2017, with reminders to complete the survey sent every two days during this period.

This report is a summary of the post-Program survey results.

¹ The Program defines small business based on the Government of Alberta's definition of having "between 1 and 49 employees." Sourced from: Government of Alberta. (2014, October). *Alberta Small Business Profile 2014*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smallbusiness.alberta.ca/media/6291/smallbusinessprofile2014.pdf>

Post-Program Survey Results

Executive Summary

The review of the post-Program survey data identified the following key points:

- The majority of the 313 survey respondents indicated financial support was the most effective way to assist their businesses' workforce challenges and opportunities.
- The majority of the Program funds was used for payroll to ensure retention of employees.
- Nearly half of the survey respondents, 46 per cent, reported maintaining staffing levels in 2016.
- Prior to the 2016 Horse River Wildfire, between December 2015 and April 2016, the 313 survey respondents reported substantial workforce reductions of 37 per cent, indicating a significant decline due to the economic downturn.
- Following the May 2016 Horse River Wildfire, between September 2016 and April 2017, the 313 survey respondents reported a relatively stable workforce with some slight growth in April 2017.

Post-Program Survey Data

The post-Program survey data analysis is based on the following:

The post-Program survey data represents the following sampling:

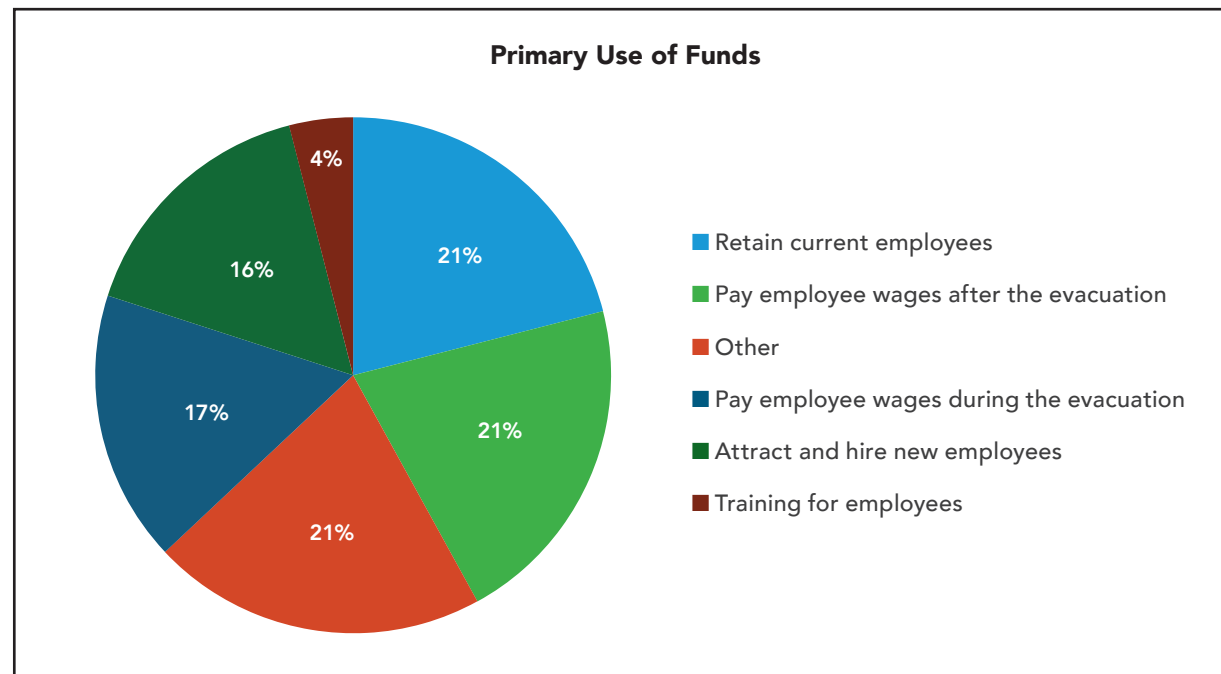
- A total of 313 businesses completed the survey out of the 692 businesses that received the Program's financial assistance
- Small businesses are defined as having 1 – 49 employees (based on the GOA's definition)²
- Small businesses are located within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

Please note that the survey data analysis for this report is unable to separate the impact of the 2016 Horse River Wildfire and the impact of the economic downturn when reporting on post-wildfire statistics. Therefore, for the purposes of this report, post-wildfire statistics represent an impact by both the economic downturn and the 2016 Horse River Wildfire.

² The Program defines small business based on the Government of Alberta's definition of having "between 1 and 49 employees." Sourced from: Government of Alberta. (2014, October). *Alberta Small Business Profile 2014*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smallbusiness.alberta.ca/media/6291/smallbusinessprofile2014.pdf>

Survey Question #1: Primary Use of Funds

The below chart illustrates the 313 survey respondents' answers to question one in the survey: "What was the primary use of the funds you received from the Program?"



The 313 survey respondents identified that Program funding was spent as follows:

- 21 % to retain current employees
- 21% to pay employee wages AFTER the evacuation
- 21 % other
- 17% to pay employee wages DURING the evacuation
- 16% to attract and hire new employees
- 4 % for training for employees

Survey respondents that selected "other" elaborated on the following themes:

- Pay rent, debts, living expenses
- Buy new equipment/supplies
- Rebuild, renovate
- Marketing

Findings

- The majority of the Program funds was used for payroll to ensure retention of employees.
- Another significant portion of the funds (identified as part of 'Other') was used to rebuild businesses' premises.

Survey Question #1: Primary Use of Funds Further Breakdown

This information is based on survey respondents' answers to question one. To further understand the primary use of funds, secondary questions were asked regarding:

- Retaining current employees,
- Attracting and hiring new employees, and
- Training employees.

The following charts illustrate the survey respondents' responses to these additional questions.

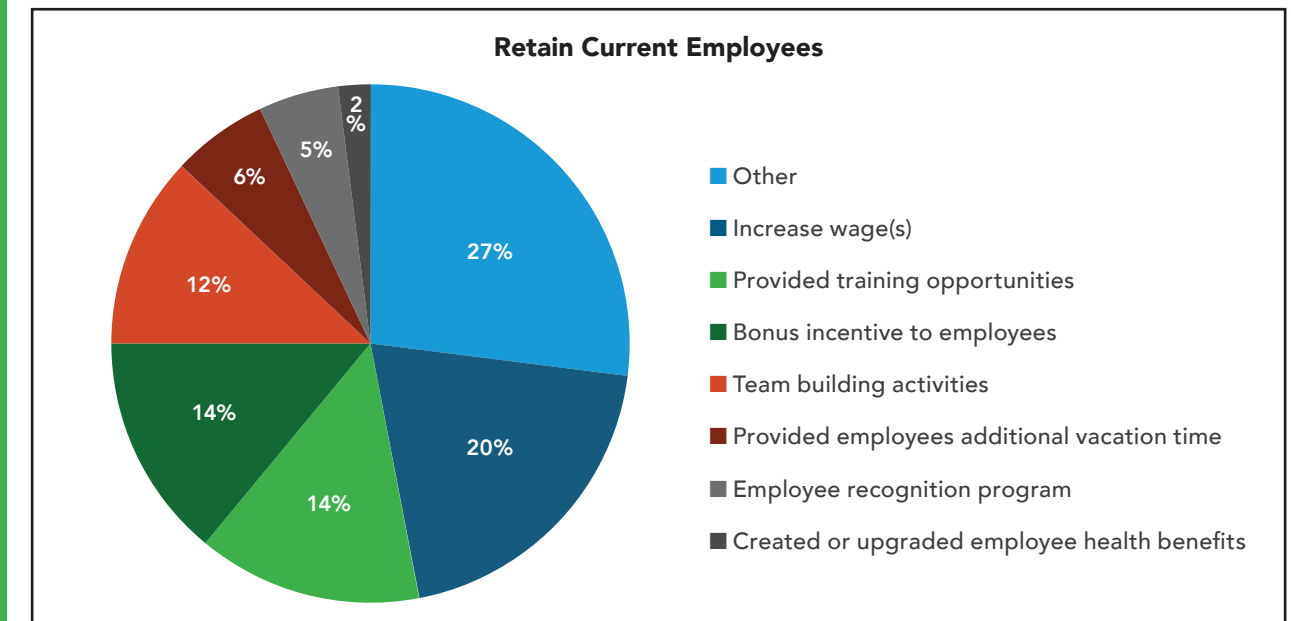
Question: How did you spend the funds to retain your current employees?"

This chart shows the top three responses of 64 of the 313 survey respondents:

- 20% increased wage(s)
- 14% provided training opportunities
- 14% provided a bonus incentive to employees

Twenty-seven per cent of survey respondents that identified with "other" indicated the following top themes:

- Maintained payroll
- Continuation of regular work hours for employees



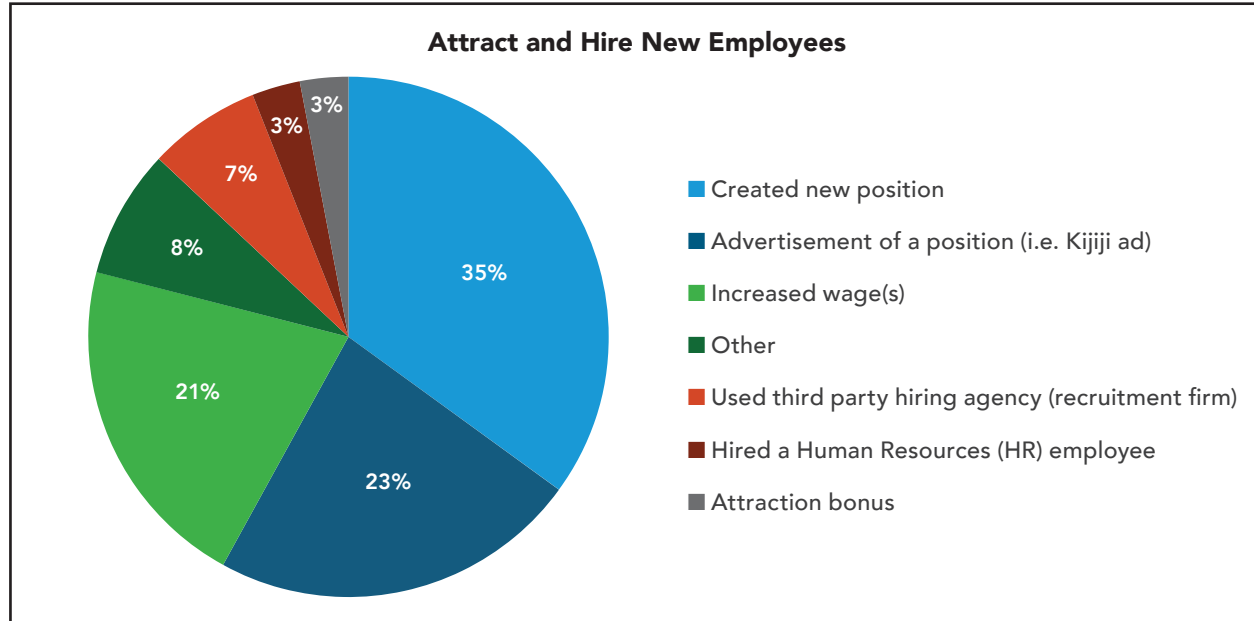
Question: How did you spend the funds to attract and hire new employees?"

This chart shows the top three responses of 51 of the 313 survey respondents:

- 35% created a new position
- 23% advertisement of a position (i.e. Kijiji ad)
- 21% increased wage(s)

Eight per cent of survey respondents that identified with "other" indicated the following top theme:

- Provided accommodation support for employee(s)



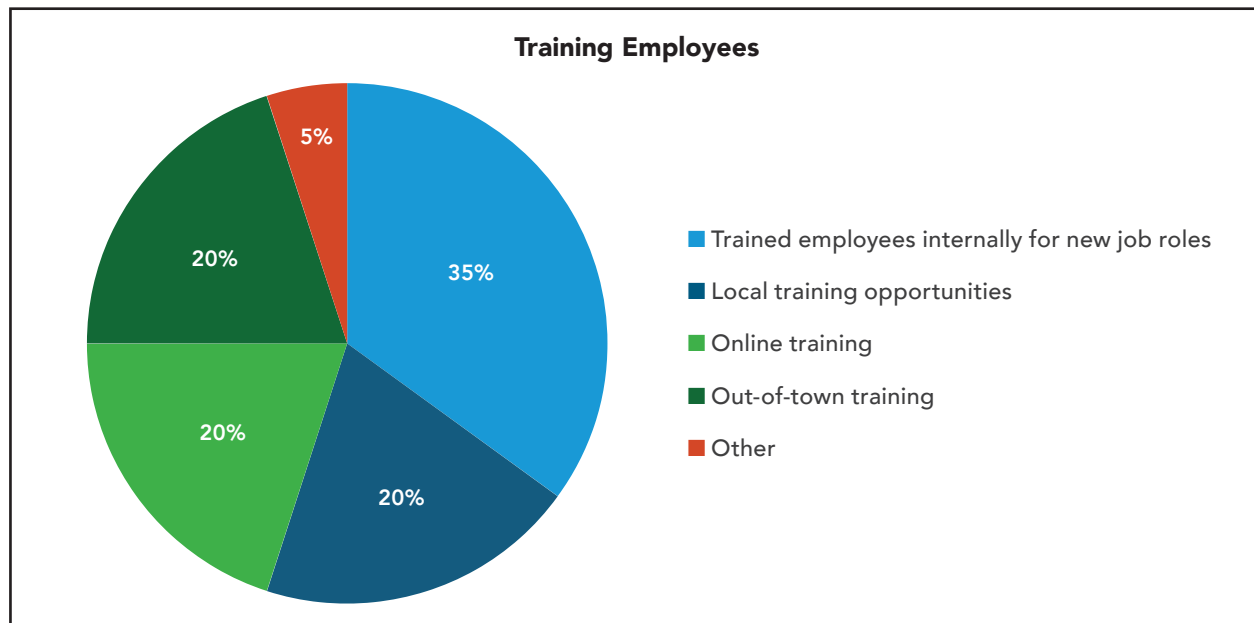
Question: How did you spend the funds training employees?"

This chart shows the top four responses of 13 of the 313 survey respondents:

- 35% trained employees internally for new job roles
- 20% local training opportunities
- 20% online training
- 20% out-of-town training

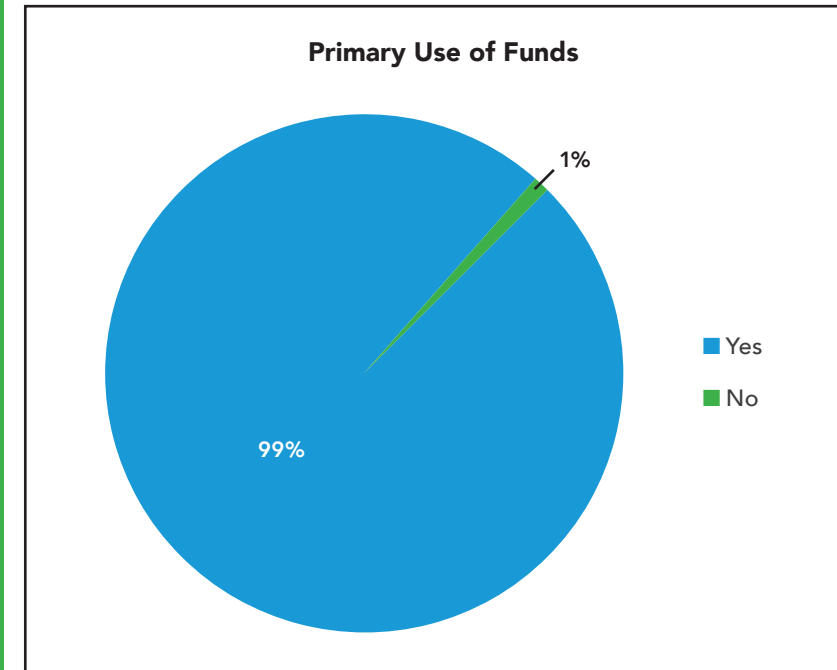
Five per cent of survey respondents that identified with "other" indicated the following top theme:

- Brought in trainers



Survey Question #2: Effectiveness of Receiving Financial Support

The below chart illustrates the 313 survey respondents' answers to question two in the survey: "Did you find receiving financial support to be the most effective way to assist your business in meeting your workforce challenges and opportunities?"



Of the 313 survey respondents:

- 309 indicated financial support was the most effective way to assist their business
- 4 indicated it was not the most effective way to assist their business

While the majority of survey respondents indicated financial support was the most effective way to assist their businesses, a few survey respondents identified the following:

- Additional support would have been welcome in respect to protecting local businesses against outside competition during the event, and
- Additional support would have been welcome in dealing with insurance companies.

Findings

- The majority of the 313 survey respondents, 309, indicated that financial support was the most effective way to assist their businesses' workforce challenges and opportunities.

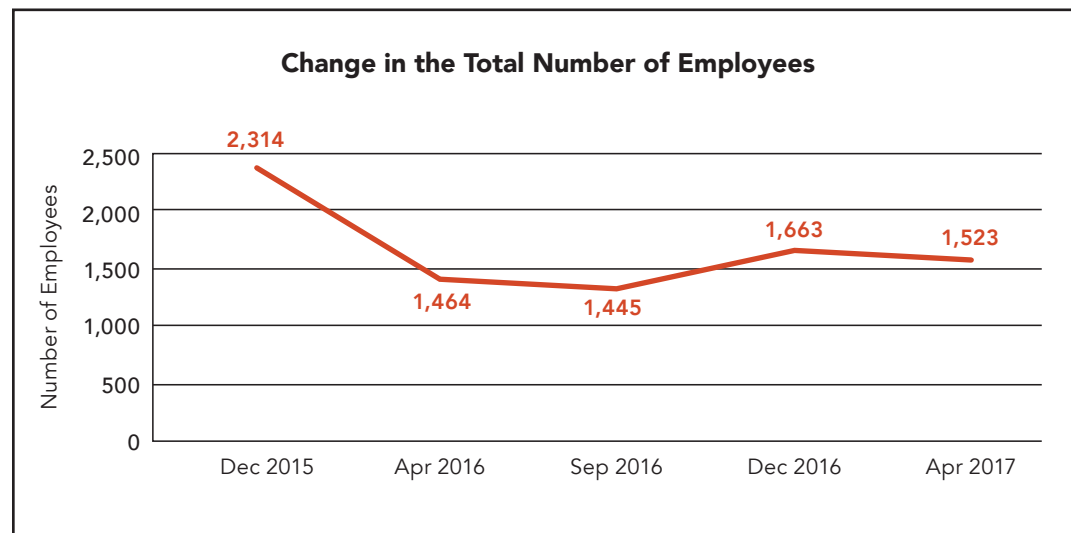
Survey Questions #3 and #4: Change in Total Number of Employees

This chart illustrates the 313 survey respondents' answers to questions three and four in the survey. These questions ask about the total number of employees in each business for the following two time periods:

- December 2016 (post-wildfire)
- April 2017 (post-wildfire)

Additionally, the chart illustrates Program application data pulled for the 313 survey respondents for the following three periods of time:

- December 2015 (pre-wildfire)
- April 2016 (pre-wildfire)
- September 2016 (post-wildfire)



Total employee counts for the 313 survey respondents were reported as follows:

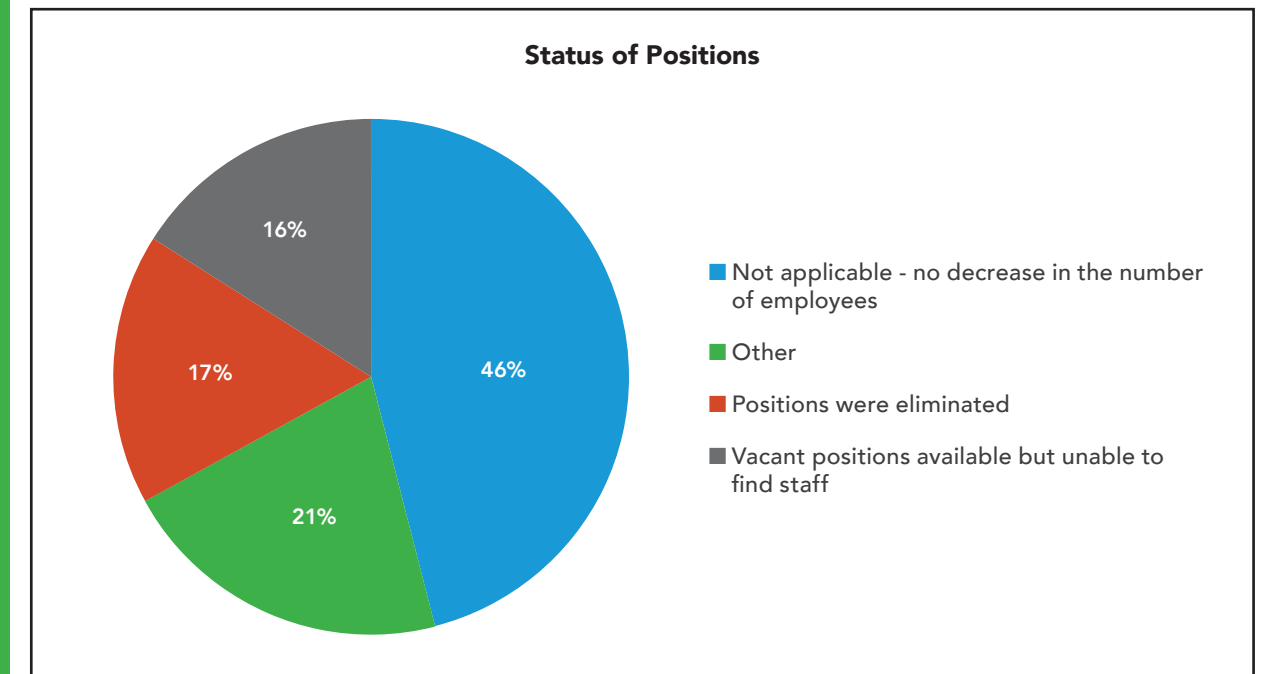
Pre-wildfire December 2015	2,314 employees
Pre-wildfire April 2016	1,464 employees
Post-wildfire September 2016	1,445 employees
Post-wildfire December 2016	1,663 employees
Post-wildfire April 2017	1,523 employees

Findings

- Prior to the 2016 Horse River Wildfire, between December 2015 and April 2016, the 313 survey respondents reported substantial workforce reductions of 37 per cent, indicating a significant decline due to the economic downturn.
- Following the 2016 Horse River Wildfire, the workforce remained relatively stable and has since shown some slight growth.

Survey Question #5: Status of Positions

This chart illustrates the 313 survey respondents' answers to question five in the survey: "If your business experienced a decline in the number of employees for the year 2016, what is the status of those positions?"



The 313 survey respondents identified the status of positions at their business as follows:

- 46% not applicable – no decrease in the number of employees
- 21% other
- 17% positions were eliminated
- 16% vacant positions available but unable to find staff

Twenty-one per cent of respondents that identified with "other" indicated the following top themes:

- A 'holding pattern' until business resumed to full operations
- Resignations
- Not enough work to fully utilize employees

Findings

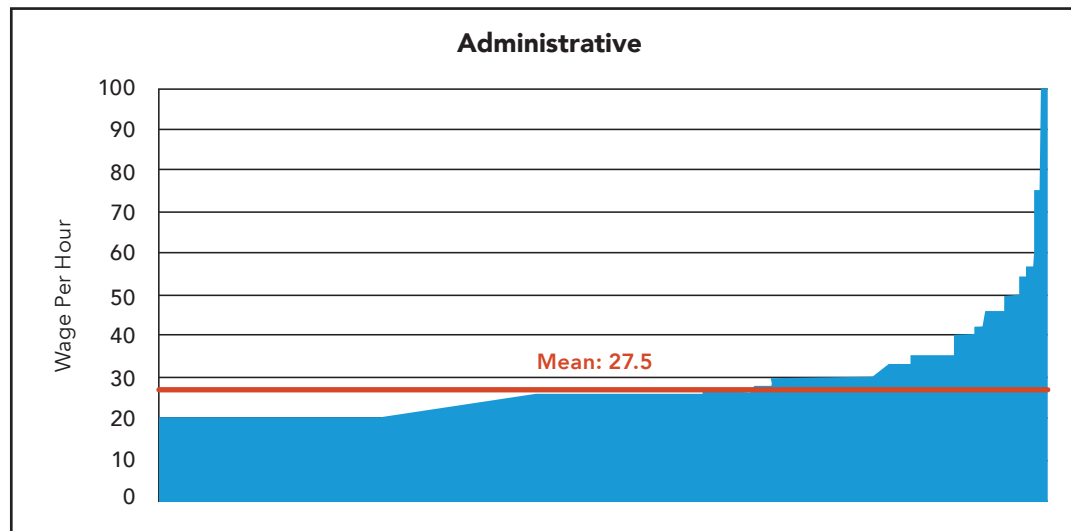
- Nearly half of the survey respondents, 46 per cent, reported maintaining staffing levels in 2016.

Survey Question #6: Current Average Wages

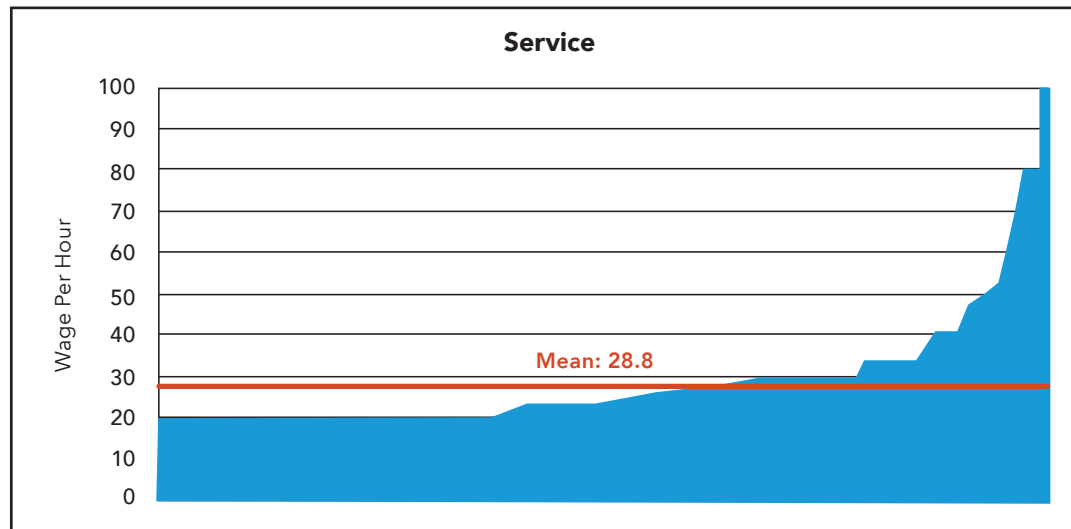
These charts illustrate the 313 survey respondents' answers to question six in the survey, which asks respondents to identify their average wages (per hour) in the following four categories (if applicable):

- Administrative (i.e. admin assistant, accounts receivable, accounts payable, reception, office support, customer service representative)
- Service Industry (i.e. food service, driver, sales, retail)
- Trades (i.e. trades worker, electrician, welder, plumber, construction)
- Professional (i.e. accountant, engineer, doctor, professor)

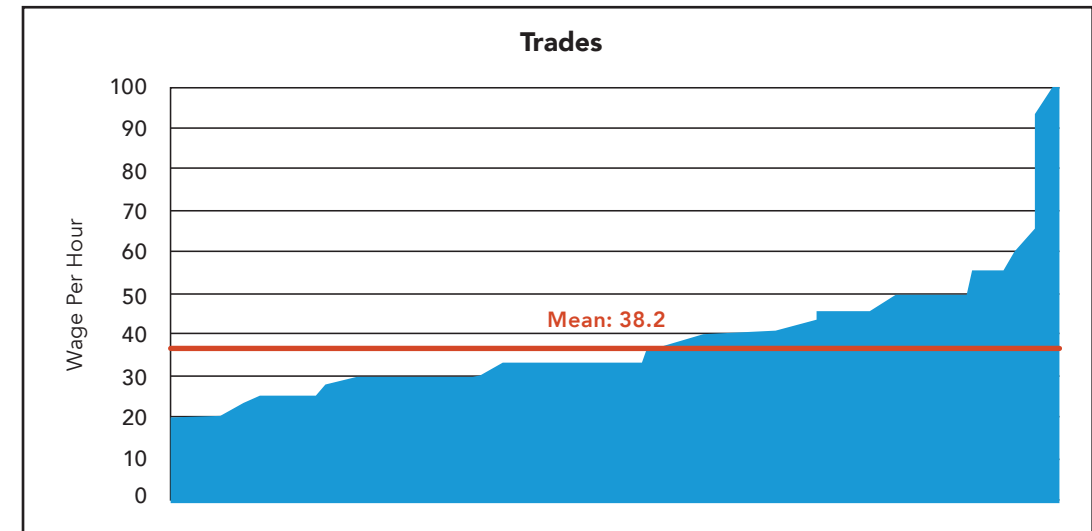
Please note that the question clearly asked for current average wages (per hour) per category and stated that these base wages do not include benefits and incentives such as the cost of living allowance or bonuses.



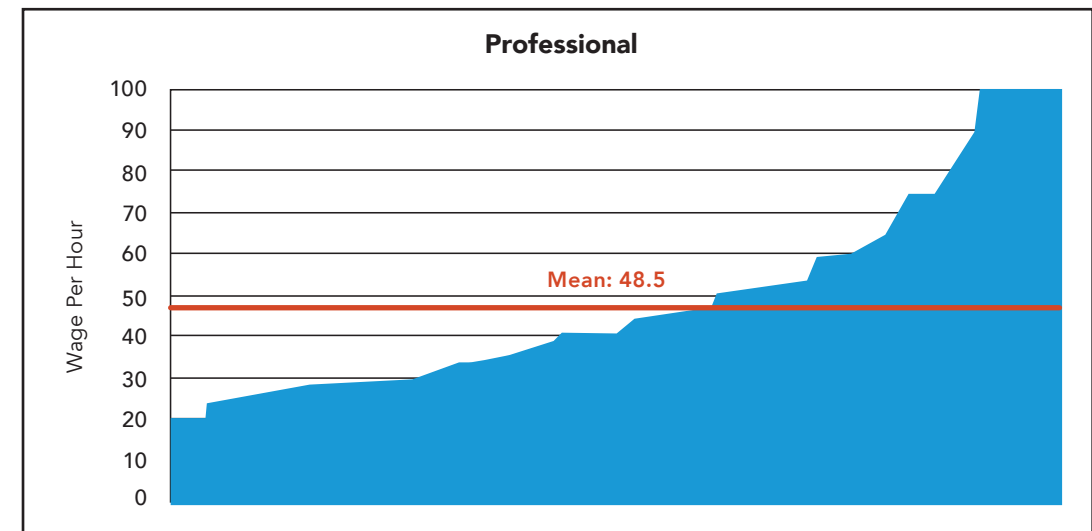
Based on 173 of the 313 survey respondents.



Based on 106 of the 313 survey respondents.



Based on 106 of the 313 survey respondents.



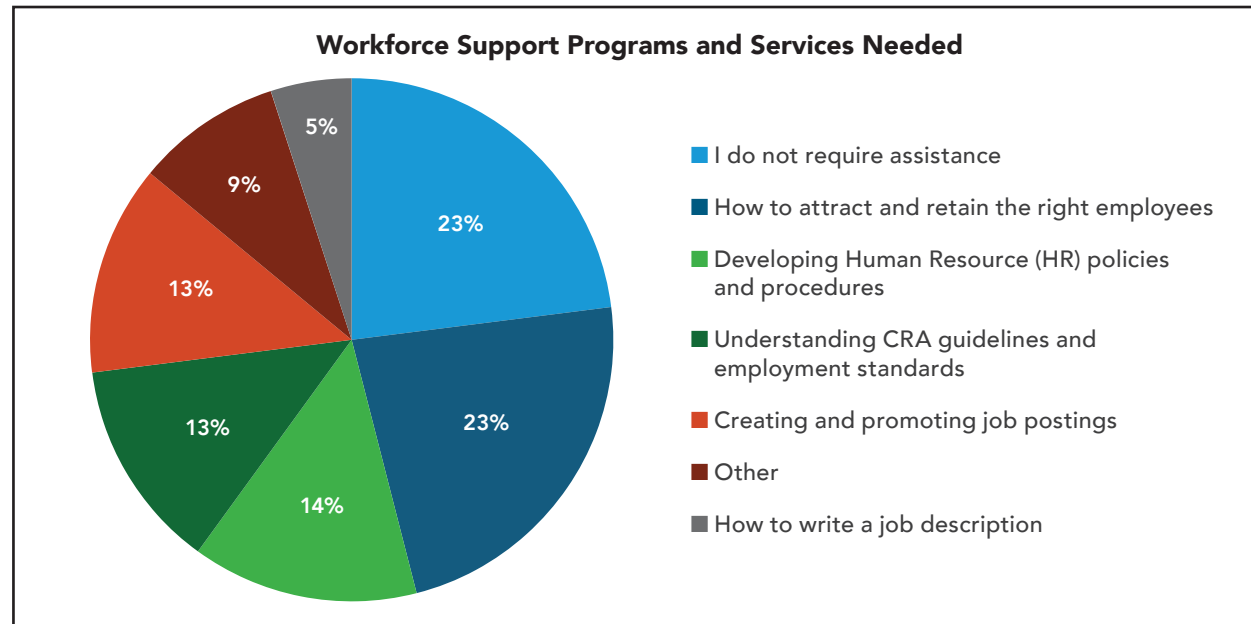
Based on 86 of the 313 survey respondents.

The wage averages for each of the four categories are as follows:

- Administrative: \$27.50 per hour
- Service Industry: \$28.80 per hour
- Trades: \$38.20 per hour
- Professional: \$48.50 per hour

Survey Question #7: Workforce Support Programs and Services Needed

This chart illustrates the 313 survey respondents' answers to question seven in the survey: "What other workforce support programs and services would be helpful to your business?"



Survey respondents indicated that the top two needed workforce support programs and services are:

- How to attract and retain the right employees (23%), and
- Developing Human Resource (HR) policies and procedures (14%).

Twenty-three per cent of survey respondents indicated they do not require additional assistance.

Findings

- There are additional opportunities to provide assistance and training.

Survey Comments: Overall Program Comments

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the Program in an open field box. In total, 151 of the 313 survey respondents provided comments. Their comments have been themed and grouped to ensure anonymity of the responses.

Theme Description	Responses
Provided a thank you or a note of appreciation for the support/Program	100
Stated they had no additional comments	26
Provided suggestions for improvement	15
Were disappointed or had a complaint	10

Findings

- The majority of comments were positive, and respondents took the opportunity to express gratitude that the Program provided support and enabled them to sustain their business during challenging times.



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