



# **Evaluation of the Financial Security for Women in Business Program**

delivered by Small Business Mentoring Service (SBMS)

and funded by Financial Literacy Australia (FLA)

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Bluebird Consultants, 2018

# 1. Executive Summary

## The Financial Security for Women in Business Program

In early 2017, the Small Business Mentoring Service (SBMS) received a \$172,000 grant from Financial Literacy Australia (FLA) to deliver the Financial Security for Women in Business Program (the Program). The Program aims to improve the financial independence and financial management practices of women running businesses.

The Program provided direct instruction in budgeting, cash-flow, financial reporting and financial management through two half-day workshops which were followed by up to three individual mentoring sessions. One hundred and thirty women participated in the Program from various metro and regional locations in Victoria. The Program participants were mostly university-qualified sole traders aged 40 to 49, and had operated their businesses for two or more years.

## Evaluation purpose

Bluebird Consultants were contracted to undertake an evaluation of the Financial Security for Women in Business Program to assess its effectiveness.

## Summary of findings

The Program was highly effective in increasing the financial management **knowledge and skills** of participants. For example, there were statistically significant increases in participants' knowledge of:

- budgeting and understanding of financial reports
- how to structure the financial elements of their businesses
- the break-even level of sales to cover their operating costs
- how to implement actions to achieve their desired business profits (see Annex 1 for further examples).

These changes were sustained six months after the Program, with 97% of participants surveyed at that point indicating that the tools and mentoring had increased their knowledge and skills.

The Program also influenced participants' **attitudes and increased their confidence**. Statistically significant changes occurred in participants' confidence to manage their business, price products and services, and cost their time. Importantly, these results were sustained following the workshops, with 89% of participants reporting in the end-of-program survey that they were more confident in their ability to run a successful business.

Other findings suggest that the attitudes of the participants shifted in terms of what they considered to be business priorities. For example, before the Program, 76% of participants reported never or seldom treating the wages they pay themselves with the same level of importance as other costs. This dropped to 52% after the Program.

A number of shifts were also noticed in relation to **financial behaviours**. Statistically significant changes occurred (following the workshops) in the amount of time participants allocated to reviewing financial reports, including Profit and Loss Statements, Balance Sheets, Debtors Reports, Aged Creditors Reports and Daily Sales Analysis. The Program also had an impact on behaviours such as making provisions for GST, tax, loan repayments and superannuation.

The majority of mentors (67%) also agreed that participants now had effective pricing strategies, and 69% agreed participants had clear sales and income targets. This correlated with highly significant increases in participants' understanding of how to price products, and set targets following the workshops.

Participants also improved systems they had in place to determine when financial issues arose. For example, there was an increased use of a financial management strategy, including a greater use of payment terms in their business practices.

However, whilst participants reported improved budgeting practices, 37% of mentors thought the businesses they supported did not yet have meaningful budgets. A similar percentage of mentors observed that businesses did not yet have realistic Key Performance Indicators. These results suggest that more intensive interventions might be required to affect change in these areas.

Overall, participants were highly satisfied with the quality of the workshops and mentoring sessions, and valued the opportunity to network with other women in business and the mentors.

The average cost per participant was \$1327 of FLA funding complemented by \$327 of SBMS funds.

<b>1.</b>	<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>List of Tables and Figures.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Evaluation purpose and methodology.....</b>	<b>7</b>
4.1.	Key evaluation questions .....	7
4.2.	Data collection process .....	7
4.3.	Data Analysis .....	8
4.4.	Limitations.....	8
<b>5.</b>	<b>Profile of Participants .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Evaluation Findings.....</b>	<b>12</b>
6.1.	<b>KEQ 1:</b> How effective were the tools and mentoring for participants to build their knowledge and skills?.....	12
6.2.	<b>KEQ 2:</b> What was the degree of attitudinal and confidence change in participants? .....	14
6.3.	<b>KEQ 3:</b> To what degree have the financial management practices of participants changed from commencement of the Program? .....	16
6.4.	<b>KEQ 4:</b> To what extent did the project change the financial capability (or financial wellbeing) of the participants? .....	20
6.5.	<b>KEQ 5:</b> How efficient was the Program? .....	22
6.6.	Women’s Feedback on the Workshops .....	23
<b>7.</b>	<b>Annexes .....</b>	<b>25</b>
7.1.	Annex 1 – List of highly significant changes (p-value < 0.001) and significant changes (p-value < 0.05) .....	25
7.2.	Annex 3 – List of metro and regional locations where workshops were held – by Local Government Area.....	27
7.3.	Annex 4 – Key Evaluation Questions and sub-questions .....	28
<b>8.</b>	<b>Appendixes attached .....</b>	<b>29</b>
8.1.	Participant profile.....	29
8.2.	Pre-Workshop 1 (baseline survey) & post-Workshop 2 participant survey.....	29
8.3.	Evaluation dashboard instruction sheet .....	29
8.4.	Mentor survey .....	29
8.5.	End-of-program survey (upon completion of Program) .....	29

## 2. List of Tables and Figures

### Figures

Figure 1 – Program Logic simplified .....	6
Figure 2 – Participant age group – participant profile .....	9
Figure 3 – How long businesses have operated – participant profile .....	9
Figure 4 – Budgeting and financial reports – participant survey .....	13
Figure 5 - KPIs - participant survey .....	13
Figure 6 – Confidence pricing products and services – participant survey .....	14
Figure 7 – Confidence in managing business – participant survey .....	15
Figure 8 – Fear of business failure – participant survey .....	15
Figure 9 – Confidence in break-even level of sales – participant survey .....	15
Figure 10 – Ability to prepare financial reports – participant survey .....	16
Figure 11 – Understanding the cost of family expenses – participant survey .....	17
Figure 12 – Financial reports – participant survey .....	18
Figure 13 – Sales and income targets – mentor survey .....	18
Figure 14 – Financial management strategy – end-of-program survey .....	19
Figure 15 – Paying wages to oneself – participant survey .....	20
Figure 16 – Treating wages paid to oneself with greater importance – participant survey .....	20
Figure 17 – Confidence costing time – participant survey .....	21
Figure 18 – Providing for superannuation – participant survey .....	21
Figure 19 – Achieving profits and sales targets – participant survey .....	22
Figure 20 - Evaluation dartboard feedback .....	23
Figure 21 – Mentors’ confidence in providing advice to the business owner – mentor survey .....	24

### Tables

Table 1 – Data collection tools – when they were applied and response rates .....	8
Table 2 – Average monthly profit of businesses – participant profile .....	10
Table 3 – Weekly wages paid by business – participant profile .....	10
Table 4 – Financial management practice changes – participant survey .....	16
Table 5 – Income and sales targets/fixed and variable costs – participant survey .....	19
Table 6 – Growing the business and paying bills more easily – participant survey .....	22

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We would also like to thank the workshop facilitators and all of the mentors and program participants who provided their feedback.

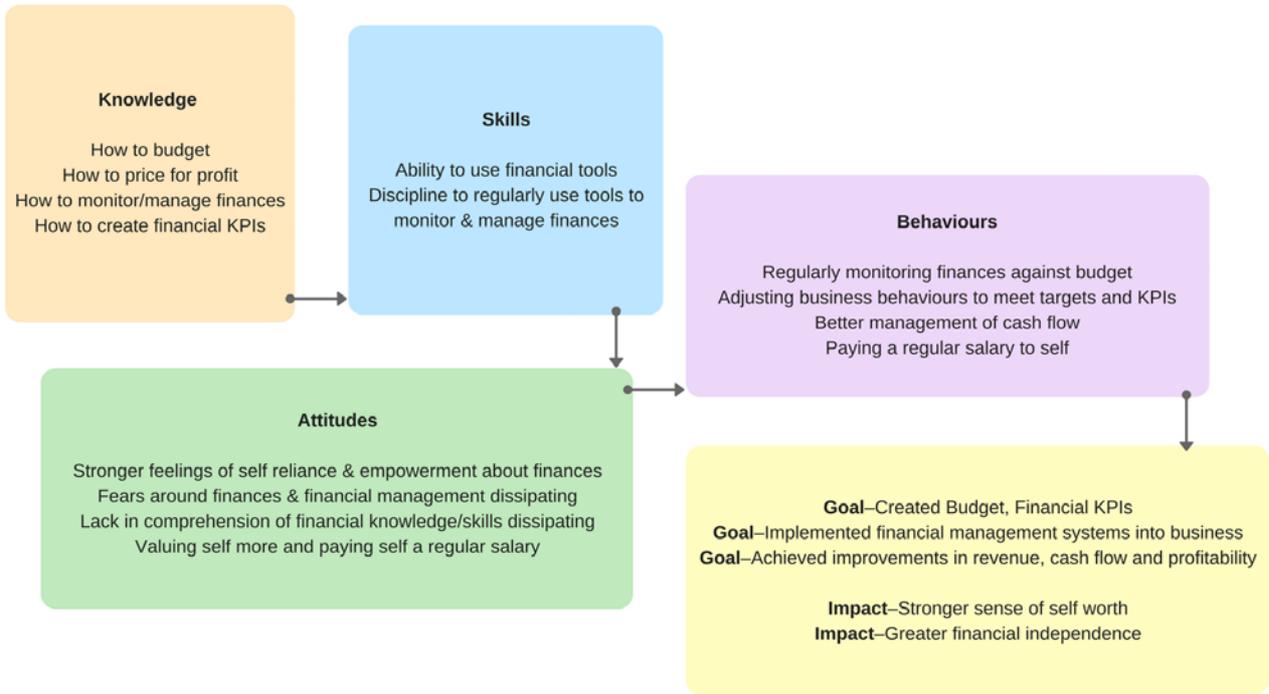
### 3. Introduction

The Small Business Mentoring Service (SBMS) provides business support, training, advocacy and private mentoring services to small business in Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales. In early 2017, SBMS was funded by Financial Literacy Australia (FLA) to deliver the Financial Security for Women in Business Program. The Program aimed to improve the financial management practices of women in business and to strengthen the viability, sustainability and financial independence of their businesses.

The Program provided direct instruction through the provision of two half-day workshops in which a series of practical tools were used to assist participants with budgeting, cash-flow, financial reporting and financial management. Workshops were typically held about one month apart and were followed by individual mentoring sessions in the participant’s home or workplace. As part of the FLA-funded Program, a series of twelve workshops series were held, with a total of 130 women participating across metro and regional locations (see Annex 2).

The workshops and mentoring intended to build women’s knowledge and skills, change attitudes and build confidence. This was expected to influence financial behaviours in order to assist businesses to have more effective budgets, financial management systems, and improved cash-flow and profitability; to ultimately impact positively on women’s financial independence and self-worth.

Figure 1 – Program Logic simplified



## 4. Evaluation purpose and methodology

The Small Business Mentoring Service (SBMS) received a \$172,000 grant from Financial Literacy Australia (FLA) in early 2017. Bluebird Consultants were contracted to evaluate the Program.

### 4.1. Key evaluation questions

The evaluation was guided by five overarching questions.

#### **Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs)**

1. How effective were the tools and mentoring for participants to build their knowledge and skills?
2. What was the degree of attitudinal and confidence change in participants?
3. To what degree have the financial management practices of participants changed from the commencement of the Program?
4. To what extent did the project change the financial capability (or financial wellbeing) of the participants?
5. How efficient was the Program?

A number of sub-evaluation questions were also used (see Annex 3). They are also referenced throughout this report.

### 4.2. Data collection process

A range of tools were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. At the start of the Program, demographic information was collected from participants through a participant profile. A detailed written anonymous survey was also completed by participants. This focussed on their baseline knowledge, skills, attitude and practices in financial management. This survey was replicated at the completion of Workshop 2 to identify any immediate changes. An evaluation dashboard exercise was also used to collect immediate feedback at each workshop on participants' satisfaction with the quality of the workshop.

An end-of-program survey was conducted 3–6 months after the completion of Workshop 2, and after mentoring sessions had been completed. This enabled participants to report on the changes they had sustained up to that point.

Mentors completed a written survey of their perspectives on participants' knowledge and practices and, briefly, their experiences as mentors.

The completion and oversight of various evaluation activities was facilitated by workshop trainers and mentors.

- Participant profile data was collected at enrolment in the Program
- Workshop surveys were administered by workshop trainers
- Mentors facilitated the collection of the end-of-program survey of participants
- Mentors also completed a short survey based on their role and their observations of participants' business knowledge, skills and practices
- All survey and profile data was collated by SBMS staff
- Bluebird Consultants analysed data and wrote the final report

Copies of the evaluation tools are attached (Appendixes 8.1–8.5).

## Implementation stages and response rates

A summary of when the tools were implemented and the response rate for each tool is included in the table below.

Table 1 – Data collection tools – when they were applied and response rates

Stage of the Program	Data collection tool	Response rate
Start of the Program	a. participant profile data	60%
During both Workshops 1 & 2	b. participant baseline survey	60%
	c. evaluation dartboard exercise	51% (workshop 1) 56% (workshop 2)
	d. workshop observation data	NA
	e. participant survey	58%
After Workshop 2	f. mentor survey	100%
At completion of mentoring sessions and exit from Program (i.e. 3–6 months after Workshop 2)	g. participant survey	27%

### 4.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using a t-test, which compared the results between the baseline survey and the survey after Workshop 2. Responses considered ‘significant’ had a p-value of 0.05 or below, while responses considered ‘highly significant’ had a p-value of 0.001 or below. These responses can be found in Annex 1. Qualitative data was analysed using a grounded theory approach, identifying themes that emerged from the data.

Data from the baseline survey and the survey after Workshop 2 was compared to data from the dartboard exercises conducted at the workshops, from the end-of-program survey, and from the mentor survey.

### 4.4. Limitations

Due to logistical limitations and available resources, individual profile data was not correlated with results from other evaluation tools. Instead, results were compiled at the aggregate level to demonstrate what the Program achieved for participants ‘overall’.

Other limitations included not being able to interview participants who had left the program early in order to find out what reasons were given. The original evaluation design included these interviews as well as more in-depth case studies to be conducted with individual participants; however, these did not go ahead at the request of SBMS. It was instead decided to extract as much learning as possible from the other evaluation methods.

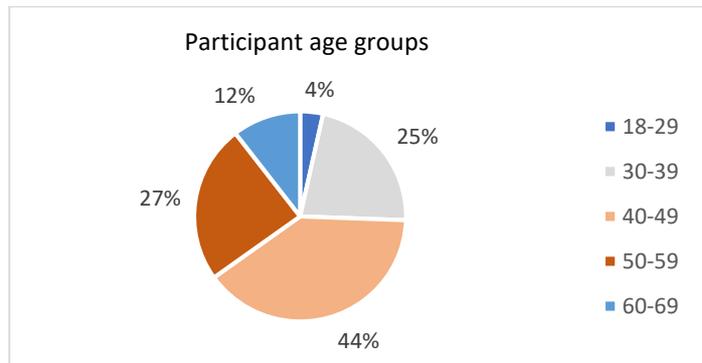
## 5. Profile of Participants

Profiles were collected from 60% of participants. The following provides an overview of participant characteristics.

Figure 2 – Participant age group – participant profile

### Age

- Largest group of participants (44%) aged 40–49 years
- Just 4% of participants aged 18–29 years



### Language

All participants spoke English at home. Only eight participants specified that they also spoke other languages. This indicates that the Program did not reach a culturally and linguistically diverse range of participants. In certain areas this was likely related to lower levels of linguistic diversity (particularly in regional Victoria). More specific targeting would be required in future to attract participants from more diverse backgrounds.

### Highest level of education and previous business training

Participants were highly qualified, with 74% holding university qualifications and 37% having completed Year 12 or an apprenticeship. The majority had undertaken some form of prior business development training (72%). Forty percent of participants had completed training through local councils, which suggests local councils play a key role in facilitating small business development opportunities and should ideally be involved in any future iterations of this Program.

### Business model

- 62% sole traders – the largest group
- 25% used a company structure

Figure 3 – How long businesses have operated – participant profile

### Business maturity

- 44% had operated their business for less than 2 years
- 35% had operated between 2 and 5 years
- 34% had operated more than 5 years

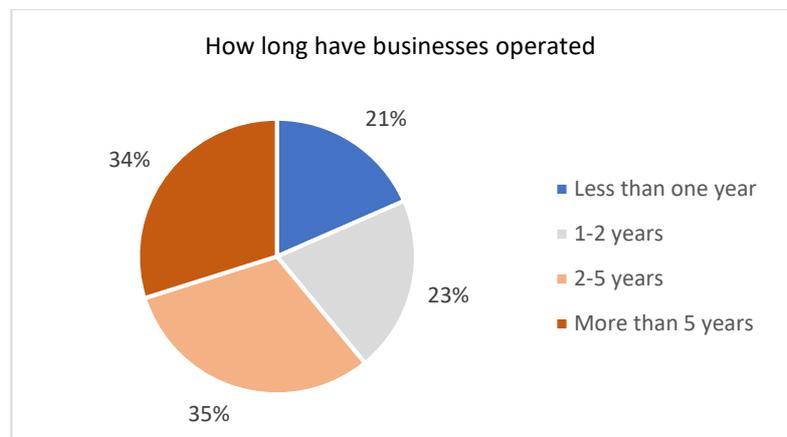


Table 2 – Average monthly profit of businesses – participant profile

**Monthly profit**

The majority of participants operated businesses with low levels of profit and were in the earlier phases of developing their business. 63% of businesses earned less than \$2,000 profit per month and just 8% of businesses earned \$5,000–\$7,000 profit per month.

Average monthly profit of businesses	
Less than \$1,000	44%
\$1,001 to \$2,000	19%
\$2,001 to \$5,000	13%
\$5,001 to \$7,000	8%
\$7,001 to \$10,000	1%
\$10,001 to \$12,000	3%
Don't know	9%
Prefer not to say	13%

Table 3 – Weekly wages paid by business – participant profile

Weekly wages paid by business	
Less than \$100	39%
\$101 to \$250	9%
\$251 to \$500	14%
\$501 to \$750	8%
\$751 to \$1,000	4%
\$1,001 to \$1,500	3%
\$1,501 to \$2,500	4%
Prefer not to say	22%

**Weekly wages paid by business**

Most participants earned very low wages from their business, with 39% earning less than \$100 per week, and almost half earning less than \$250 per week.

**Family reliance on business as source of income**

Business income data was compared to the proportion of the family's overall income.

- 21% listed their business as the primary source of income
- 35% had a secondary source of income
- 30% stated that the business income did not contribute significantly to family income

Hence, 65% of participants did not rely on their business as the primary source of income. This suggests the level of reliance upon businesses for financial security varied significantly across different participant cohorts. The significance of whether business income was solely relied upon or not was also noted in workshop observation data. It was discussed that women who do not rely on their business as the primary source of income can experience less pressure in developing their business than those who solely rely on their business for income.

**Limitations on the use of profile data**

Further research is required to determine whether training needs might differ amongst these groups. For example, profile data highlights that while some participants' businesses had been operating for less than two years (44%), other participants had been operating their businesses for more than two years (35%),

and some for more than five years (34%). Similar distinctions can be made between those earning less than \$1000 profit per month (44% – though not necessarily correlated with the duration of business) and those earning more than this (44% in total).

It would be safe to assume that the training and business development needs of participants could vary across these groups. In future, it would be useful to correlate participant responses between such groups. This would build more understanding about possible correlations between the number of years a business has operated, the amount of profit it makes, and the outcomes different types of business owners experienced in such programs.

## 6. Evaluation Findings

### 6.1. KEQ 1: How effective were the tools and mentoring for participants to build their knowledge and skills?

Statistically significant change occurred in participants' **knowledge and skills**, particularly in budgeting and understanding of financial reports and structuring the financial elements of their businesses. These changes were sustained six months after the Program with 97% of participants surveyed at that point indicating that the tools and mentoring had increased their knowledge and skills. For example, 83% of participants felt comfortable with financial terminology and tools, e.g. spreadsheets, workbooks, and various templates. These tools were used in the context of topics such as break-even analysis and understanding cash flow.

The aspects of financial management that participants learned most about included:

- Earnings
- Break-even and planning ahead
- Budgeting and financial reports
- Finances and wellbeing
- Financial management
- Pricing

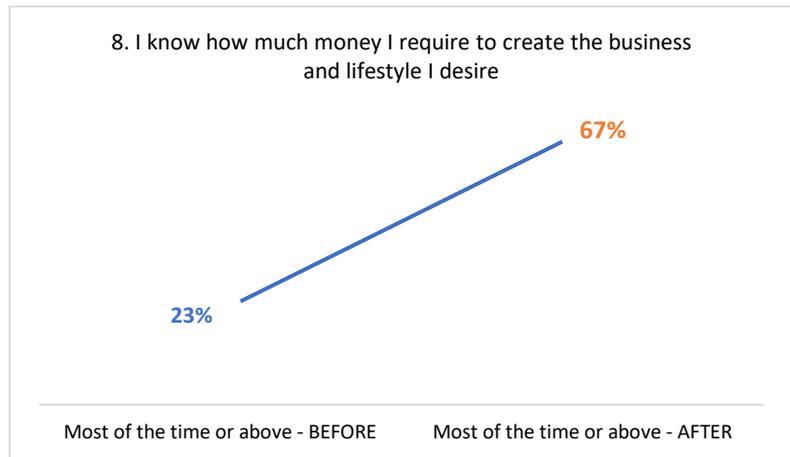
For example, in terms of earnings, participants' knowledge and skills increased significantly in relation to knowing the cost of their family expenses, having a clear income and annual sales target, and knowing the variable and fixed costs of their business. Fifty-one percent of participants had an annual sales target after the workshops, compared to only 21% before the workshops. The six-month survey provided additional evidence of these results.

#### a. Were participants able to create meaningful budgets?

Survey answer options included 'never, seldom, sometimes, most of the time, and always'. Often when significant change occurred, it could be seen across all answer types. For example, in addition to the significant change shown in the graph below, and in response to the same question, 48% of participants also reported that they had never or had seldom known how much money they required for their business prior to the workshops. This reduced to just 11% after Workshop 2.

Figure 4 – Budgeting and financial reports – participant survey

Participants improved their knowledge in relation to financing their business and lifestyle. This improvement was statistically highly significant ( $p = < 0.001$ ).



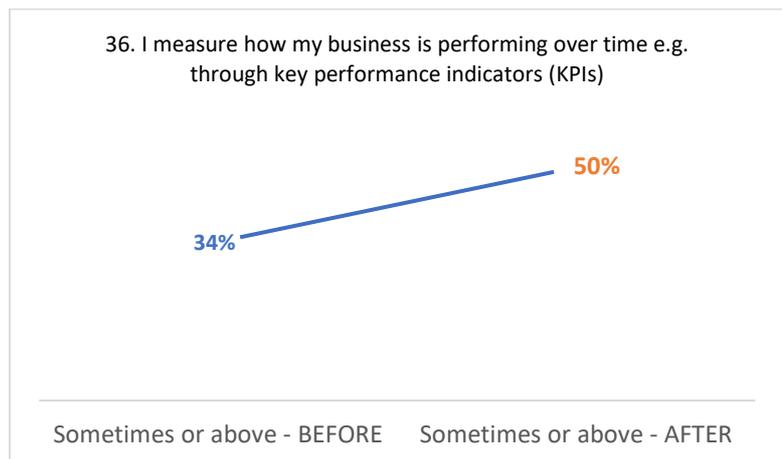
This finding suggests that the Program addressed a priority of SBMS. The Program highlights common misunderstandings that SBMS believe results in many small businesses facing financial difficulties. One of these includes ‘businesses spending too much time attempting to work within the boundaries of the money they have, rather than working on strategies and activities to generate the money they require to succeed’ (in Workshop 1 training materials). A feature of the Program is its emphasis on the need for a business to be developed within the context of the business owner’s overall life, including family life; and that owners should acknowledge the lifestyle they desire.

In response to whether participants avoided budgeting, prior to the workshops 76% suggested that they **did** avoid budgeting sometimes, or more frequently. After the workshops, this reduced to 59% of participants still avoiding budgeting sometimes or more frequently. Whilst this result was statistically significant and indicates a shift in attitudes toward budgeting, the size of the shift suggests that participants may have required more support in the area of budgeting. A larger change in practice may also necessitate a longer period of time to instil.

b. Were participants able to establish realistic KPIs?

Figure 5 - KPIs - participant survey

Participants reported measuring their business performance more often through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and improving their use of monitoring and reporting tools. The percentage of participants who use KPIs sometimes or more frequently increased from 34% to 50%. This result was statistically significant.



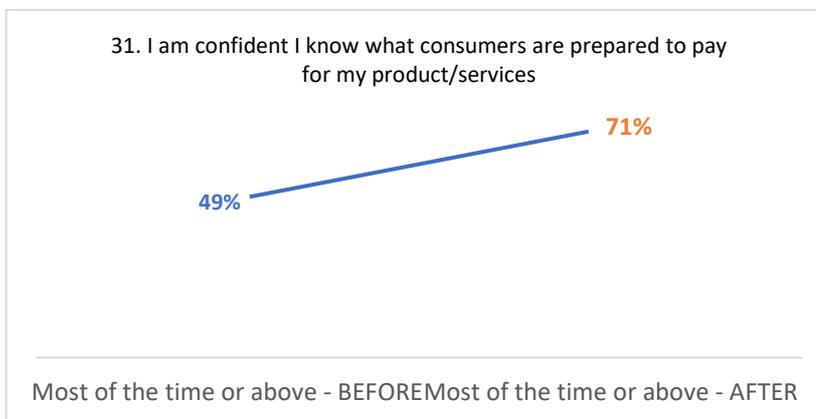
However, whilst participants self-assessed an increased use of KPIs, 35% of mentor reports did not agree that participants had realistic KPIs.

c. What other knowledge and skills did the participants gain from the training and mentoring?

Participants also reported positively on other areas of knowledge and skills, including feeling more comfortable with financial terminology and tools as well as pricing their products and services.

Figure 6 – Confidence pricing products and services – participant survey

There was a statistically significant increase in participants’ knowledge of pricing products. The percentage of participants who increased their confidence and knowledge about what consumers were willing to pay for their products and services increased from 49% to 71%.



Participants also considered what consumers might pay for their products and services more often.

Other survey responses added weight to change regarding participant’s knowledge of pricing. For example, prior to the workshops, 30% reported that they had **never or seldom** considered the profit margins of others, the price at which manufacturers sell, or the prices consumers are willing to pay. This dropped to just 13% after Workshop 2.

Other significant changes were found in areas related to pricing. For example, participants were better able to understand how to position their businesses in the wider market, and how their skill set and specialisation related to competitors.

Survey question	Most of the time or above - BEFORE	Most of the time or above - AFTER
I am able to justify my prices to buyers easily	65%	86%
I understand how my pricing, speciality, skill set and reputation compares to my competitors	57%	74%

Prior to the workshops, 15% of participants reported that they had never or seldom understood how their pricing compared to competitors. After the workshops, this dropped to 0%.

6.2. KEQ 2: What was the degree of attitudinal and confidence change in participants?

There were statistically significant increases in the number of participants who changed attitudes and increased their confidence as a result of the Program. These changes occurred in participants’ confidence to manage their business, price products and services, and cost their time. Importantly, these results were sustained, with 89% of participants reporting in the end-of-program survey that they were more confident in their ability to run a successful business.

a. To what extent were participants feeling more empowered to create financial independence?

Figure 7 – Confidence in managing business – participant survey



Participants reported an increase in confidence in how they manage their business as well as a reduction in fear of their business failing.

Figure 8 – Fear of business failure – participant survey

Prior to the workshops, the percentage of participants who feared their business would fail most of the time was 10%. This dropped to just 1% after. This result was statistically significant.

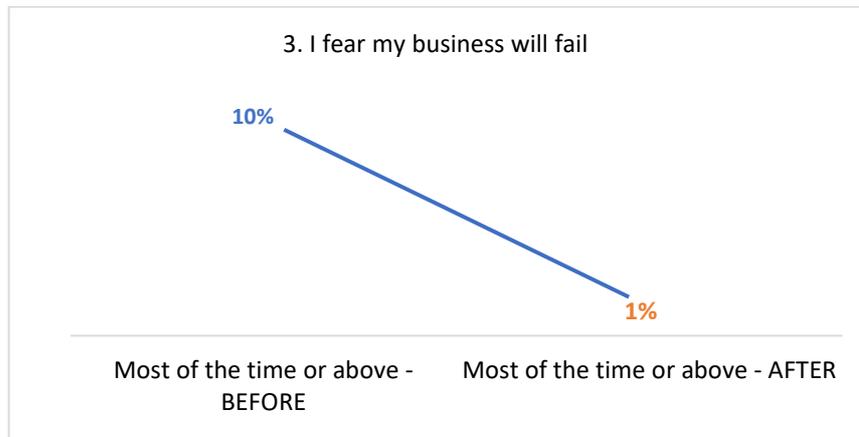
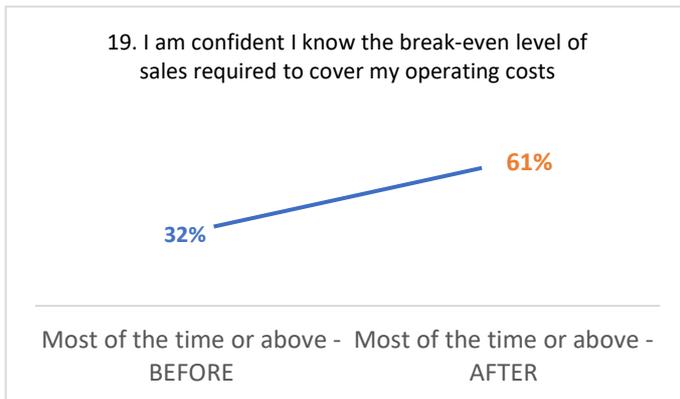


Figure 9 – Confidence in break-even level of sales – participant survey

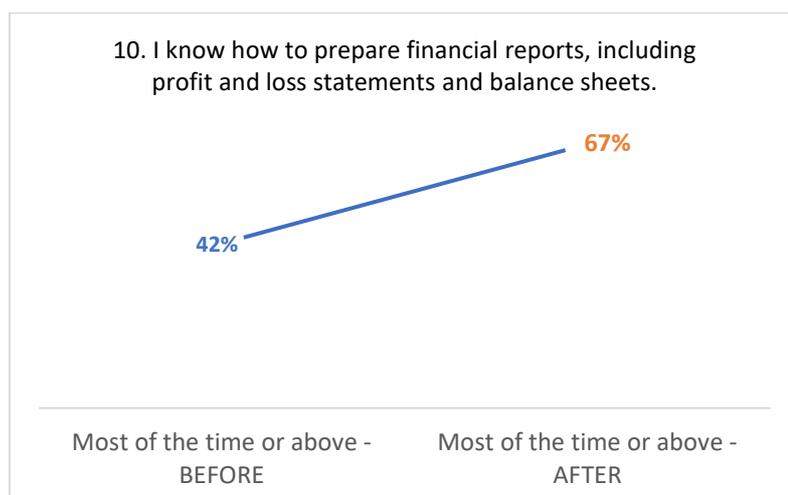


The percentage of participants who were confident to better manage their operational costs increased from 32% to 61%. This increase was highly significant.

b. To what extent did participants feel more comfortable with financial terminology/tools?

Figure 10 – Ability to prepare financial reports – participant survey

As a result of the Program, participants were more comfortable understanding financial terminology and using financial tools. For example, the improvement in knowledge related to preparing financial reports, including profit-and-loss statements and balance sheets, was highly significant.



The end-of-program survey found that 83% of participants reported feeling more comfortable with financial terminology and tools.

6.3. KEQ 3: To what degree have the financial management practices of participants changed from commencement of the Program?

The most significant changes in financial management practices related to participants' improved abilities to plan for and structure the financial elements of their business. For example, participants reported being better able to prepare financial reports, including profit-and-loss statements and balance sheets, as well as having more effective bookkeeping systems in place.

a. What has changed in how regularly and thoroughly participants are monitoring/managing their finances?

There was a 50% rise in participants knowing how to plan and structure their business. The following table provides an overview of changes that are considered highly significant. They include participants having an increased ability to monitor and manage their finances and understand their costs. These findings suggest that the Program provided participants with substantial knowledge they did not previously have, including skills in using financial tools.

Table 4 – Financial management practice changes – participant survey

Survey question	Most of the time or above - BEFORE	Most of the time or above - AFTER
I know how to plan and structure the financial elements of my business	22%	72%
I am confident I know the break-even level of sales required to cover my operating costs	32%	61%
I know how to prepare financial reports, including profit-and-loss statements and balance sheets.	42%	67%
I allocate regular time to reviewing financial reports e.g. Profit & Loss Statement; Balance Sheets; Debtors Report; Aged Creditors Report; Daily Sales Analysis	7%	25%

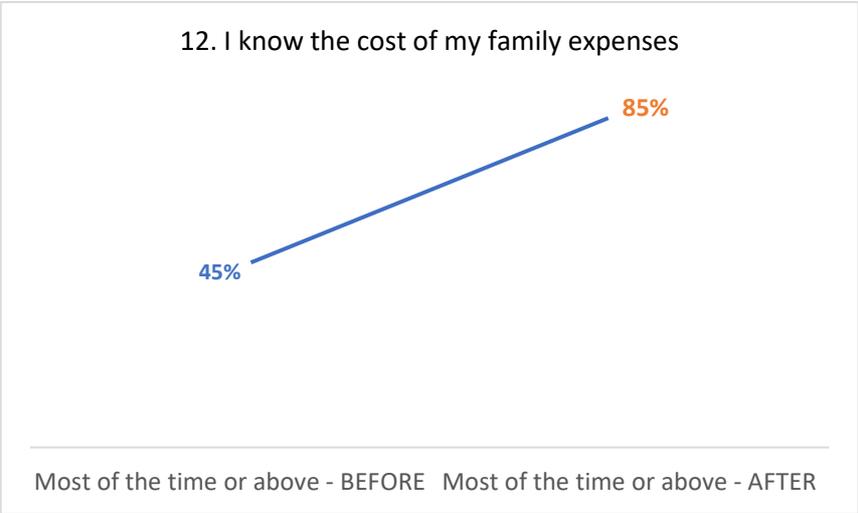
In addition to these findings, 67% of mentors agreed that participants had an effective pricing strategy, while 69% agreed that participants had clear sales and income targets.

The smallest change was reported in participants finding financial reporting difficult and putting money aside to cover taxes or for reinvesting in their business. This result suggests that these areas might require a longer-term approach to improving business practices. It may also mean that these topics deserve more focus during the workshops and mentoring sessions.

### The connection between business and personal finances

A feature of the Program model is its focus on the relationship between both business and personal finances. Hence, SBMS expect that improvements in broader financial knowledge, such as knowing the cost of family expenses, would contribute to good financial management practice overall. This was an area where highly significant change was reported.

Figure 11 – Understanding the cost of family expenses – participant survey



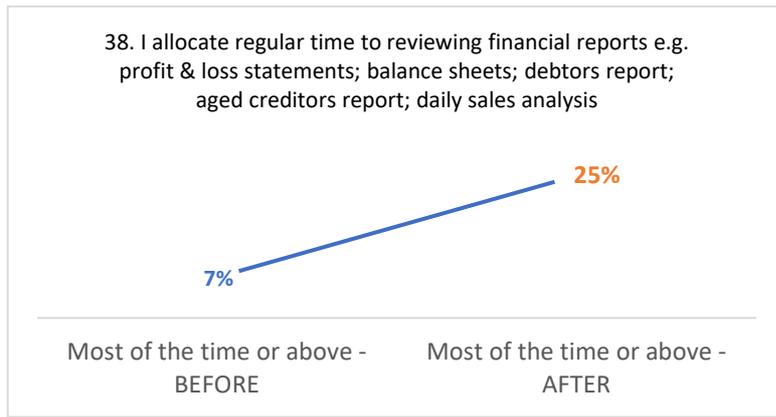
This 40% increase suggests many participants may not have considered the connection between their family and business costs prior to taking part in the Program. The Program was successful in supporting business owners to consider these issues more.

Whilst participants gained a stronger understanding of how their family expenses related to their business, **almost no change** occurred in terms of how their business impacted upon their home and social life or in relation to participants working longer hours than they would like to. Whilst significant changes have been reported in how participants structure their business, the impact upon reducing hours worked is a behaviour change that would more likely take a longer period of time to affect.

- b. Are participants using financial reporting tools to adjust business activity on a regular basis?

After completing the workshops, participants reported allocating more time to reviewing financial reports (e.g. Profit & Loss Statements, Balance Sheets). They also improved systems they had in place to determine when financial issues arose. For example, there was an increased use of a Financial Management Strategy, including reliance on pricing and stock management policies and greater use of payment terms in their business practices.

Figure 12 – Financial reports – participant survey



Prior to workshops only 7% of participants allocated regular time to reviewing financial reports. This increased to a quarter of participants reviewing their reports most of the time or more frequently after the workshops.

The finding above is strengthened by participants reporting that prior to the workshops, 69% of them had never or seldom reviewed financial reports. After completing the workshops, this figure had dropped by half, with 34% of participants never or seldom reviewing financial reports.

### Providing meaningful financial records to accountants

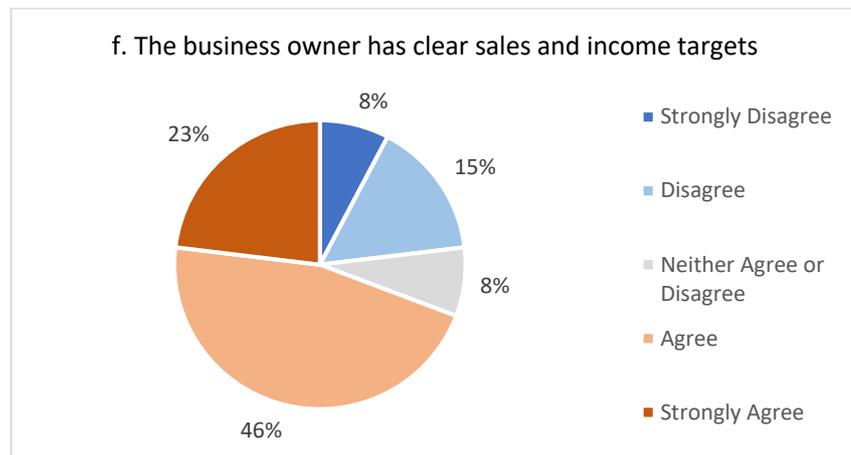
Improvements in financial reporting may have also contributed to participants being more able to provide meaningful financial records to their accountants. For example, prior to the workshops, 31% of participants reported never or seldom having the systems to provide meaningful records to their accountant. This reduced to 16% after the workshops.

#### c. How else have participants' practices changed?

A number of tangible improvements were reported in how participants made projections for their business.

Figure 13 – Sales and income targets – mentor survey

For example, according to the mentor survey, the strongest areas of improvement included the business owner having clear sales and income targets. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of mentors either agreed or strongly agreed that the business owner had clear sales and income targets in place.



Highly significant change relating to various kinds of business projections was also found in the participant survey results (see Table 5 below).

Table 5 – Income and sales targets/ fixed and variable costs – participant survey

Survey question	Most of the time or above - BEFORE	Most of the time or above - AFTER
I have a clear income target	23%	59%
I have an annual sales target	21%	51%
I know the variable costs of my business	35%	72%
I know the fixed expenses of my business	58%	88%

As a complement to the findings above, it was also found that 51% of participants reported never or seldom having an income target prior to the workshops, which reduced to just 16% after the workshops. Similarly, 15% of participants reported never or seldom knowing their fixed expenses prior to the workshops, which reduced to just 3% after the workshops. These results are a strong testament to the knowledge, tools and exercises provided by the Program.

**Provisions for GST, taxes and loan repayments, and cash-flow projections**

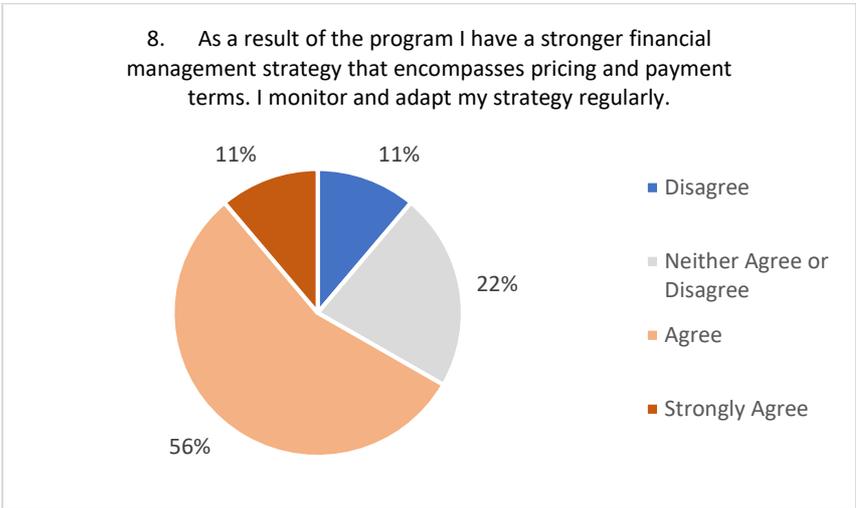
Significant change was found in participants making regular provisions for GST, taxes and loan repayments, and using cash-flow projections to understand their cash-flow shortfalls and high points.

Survey question	Sometimes or above - BEFORE	Sometimes or above - AFTER
I make regular provisions for GST, taxes and loan repayments	61%	77%
I use cash-flow projections to understand my business cash-flow shortfalls and high points	23%	41%

Figure 14 – Financial management strategy – end-of-program survey

Overall, a number of changes occurred in participants’ financial management skills and knowledge that are considered significant.

In the end-of-program survey, 70% of respondents reported having a stronger financial management strategy.

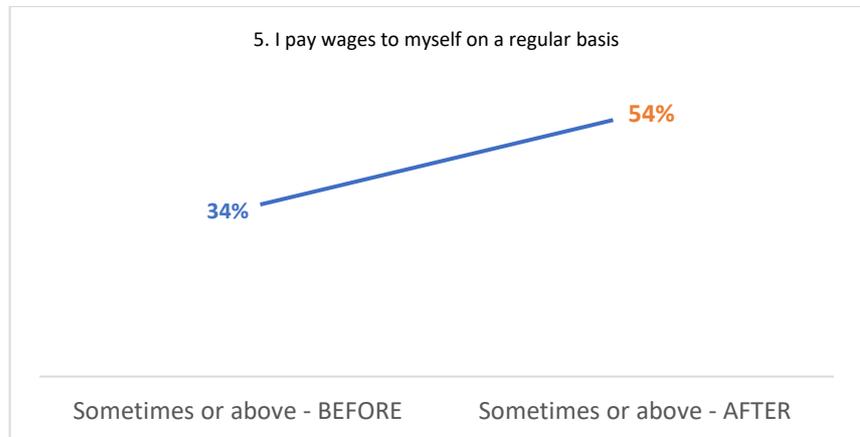


6.4. KEQ 4: To what extent did the project change the financial capability (or financial wellbeing) of the participants?

a. What has changed in how regularly participants are paying themselves?

Figure 15 – Paying wages to oneself – participant survey

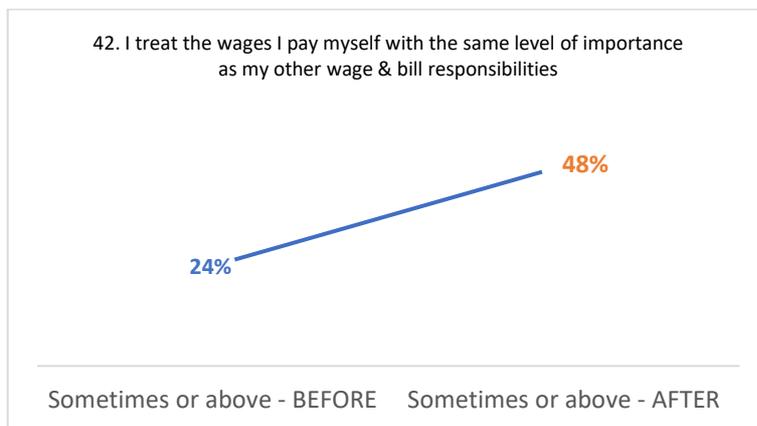
There was a significant increase in the number of participants who reported paying wages to themselves on a more regular basis from 34% to 54%.



Further change occurred amongst 65% of participants who, prior to the workshops, said they had never or seldom paid wages to themselves. After the workshops, this dropped to 46%.

It would not be expected that a short-term program would result in participants being able to pay wages to themselves more regularly, as it would have been unlikely that participants had gained greater access to finances or business profits between workshops. This increase is more likely the result of significant changes in how participants had restructured their business or thought about their business differently as a result of completing the Program..

Figure 16 – Treating wages paid to oneself with greater importance – participant survey

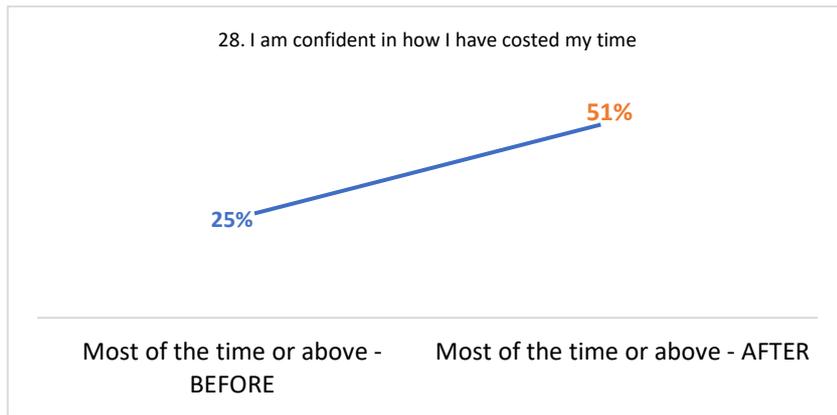


For example, almost twice as many participants reported that they had started treating the wages they pay themselves as important as other wage and bill responsibilities.

In addition, before the Program, 76% of participants reported never or seldom treating the wages they pay themselves with the same level of importance as other costs. This dropped to 52% after.

A change in attitudes toward participants paying themselves wages could also correlate with the increase in confidence participants reported in relation to costing their time.

Figure 17 – Confidence costing time – participant survey



The number of participants that felt more confident costing their time after completing workshops doubled.

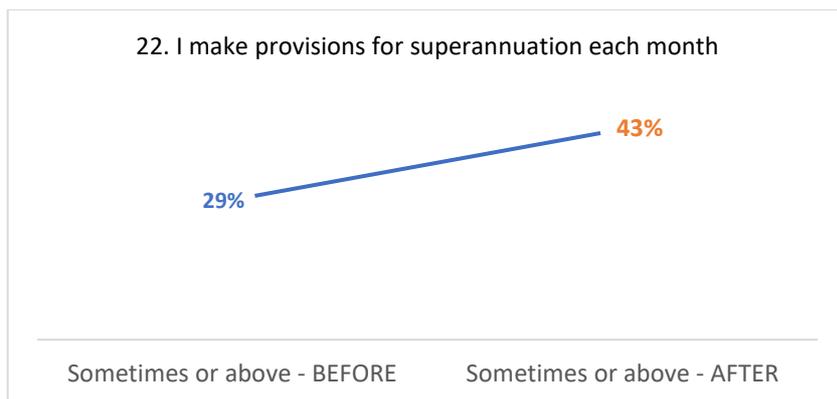
In addition to the above finding, 49% of participants also reported never or seldom costing their time prior to the workshops, which reduced to 15% after.

These findings suggest that participants’ attitudes shifted in terms of what they considered to be business priorities. This can be considered a success since participants must first *consider* paying themselves as important, even if in practice it may take more time for wages to be regularly paid.

- b. Have participants commenced or increased payments to a superannuation fund, or made any other personal (i.e. not business) investments which would contribute to their financial security?

There was a significant increase in the number of participants who make provisions for their superannuation each month. However, this result should be interpreted cautiously as the time period between before and after testing was very short – often just one month. Instead, it could be presumed that participants considered their superannuation more seriously as a result of completing the Program and learning to plan more effectively for the future of their business. For example, in the end-of-program survey, 69% of participants reported improvement in the way they plan for their business and their financial security. Considering superannuation may constitute a part of this planning.

Figure 18 – Providing for superannuation – participant survey



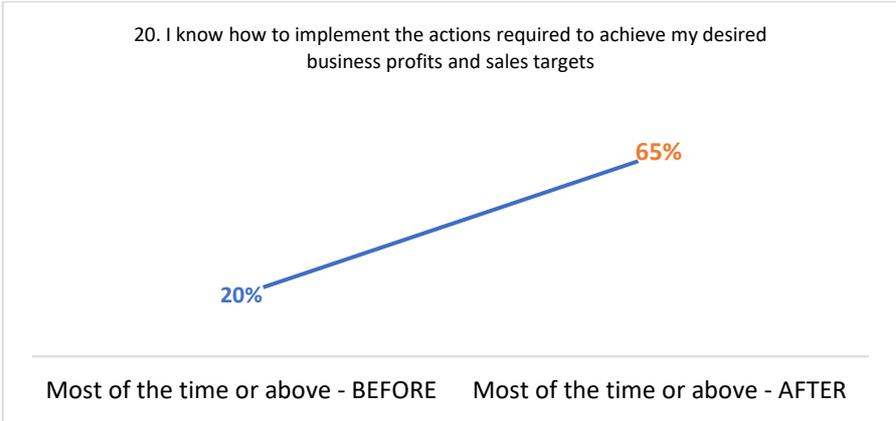
Participants reported making more provisions for superannuation each month. The percentage of participants who did this sometimes or more frequently increased from 29% to 43%. This result was statistically significant.

- c. What were the improvements, if any, in business cash-flow and profits over the six-month period? To what extent do the participants believe their involvement in the Program contributed to this?

Improvements to cash-flow were not reported. However, it is presumed improved cash-flow is not likely to be achieved in the short term and from such a time-limited Program. However, results indicate that participants had greater knowledge that might impact on their productivity. For example, participants

reported a significant improvement in knowing how to implement actions required to achieve their desired business profits and sales targets.

Figure 19 – Achieving profits and sales targets – participant survey



The percentage of participants who knew how to implement actions to achieve their desired profits and sales targets increased from 20% to 65%. This result was statistically highly significant.

They also reported putting aside a percentage of profits more often to grow their business and being able to pay their bills more easily.

The number of participants suggesting that they put aside profit most of the time or above doubled, albeit they are a smaller group. This result may be due to factors such as improvements made to the structure of the business.

Table 6 – Growing the business and paying bills more easily – participant survey

Survey question	Most of the time or above - BEFORE	Most of the time or above - AFTER
I can pay my bills easily	59%	75%
I put aside a percentage of profit to grow my business	12%	24%

6.5. KEQ 5: How efficient was the Program?

**Participation rates**

Initially, SBMS were to provide 17 workshops (10 metro Melbourne, 5 regional Victoria and 2 in Tasmania) with 10–15 participants predicted to attend each series. Due to a lack of participation caused by a number of factors such as date and venue changes, the number of workshops was reduced to 12: seven were held in metro Melbourne and five in regional Victorian locations. No workshops were held in Tasmania.

**Value for money**

Cost per participant

Based on a predicted participation rate of 255 people (i.e. 17 workshops x maximum of 15 participants per workshop), the cost per participant would have been:

- a. \$676 per participant (based on FLA funding of \$172,500 only)
- b. \$843 per participant (based on SBMS reported actual expenditure of \$215,046)

Based on the actual participation rate of 130 people (those that completed the Program), the cost per participant was:

- c. \$1327 per participant (based on FLA funding of \$172,500 only)
- d. \$1654 per participant (based on SBMS reported actual expenditure of \$215,046)

As a result of lower than expected participation rates, the cost per participant almost doubled. This suggests serious consideration needs to be given to either how the Program is promoted or to more realistically assessing the predicted rate of participation in future iterations.

Overall, evidence provided through this evaluation would suggest highly significant changes have been achieved by SBMS with the support of FLA investment.

### 6.6. Women’s Feedback on the Workshops

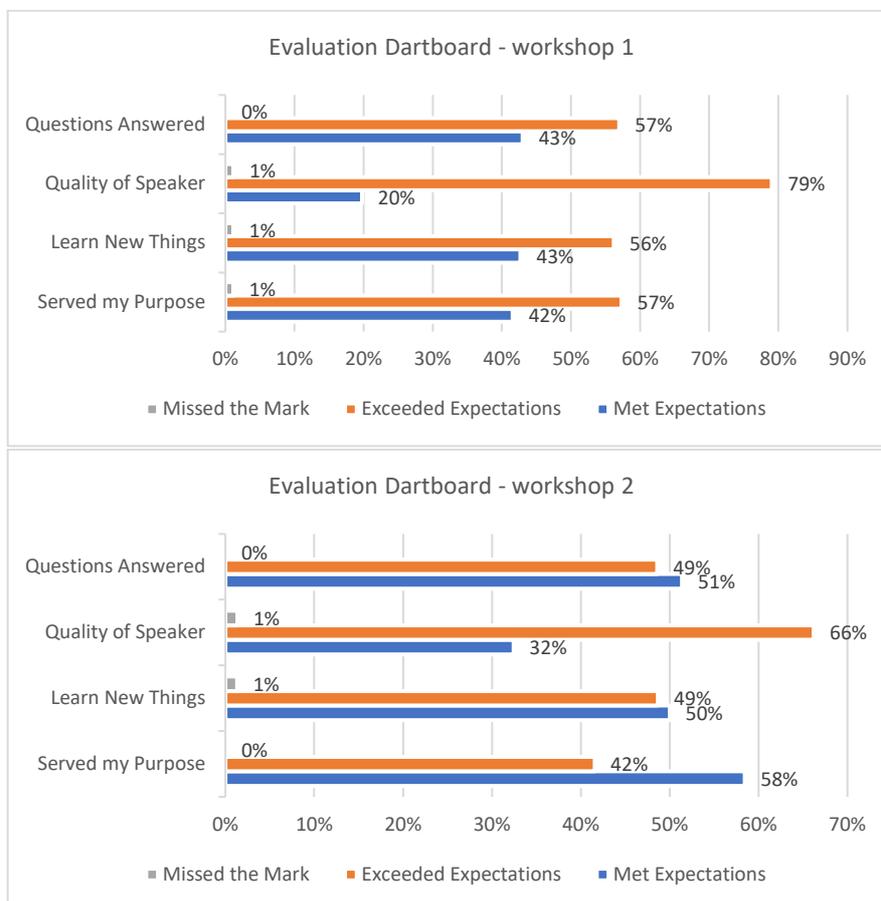
Participants particularly valued the **workshop tools and activities** that enabled them to budget and plan.

- “I especially liked preparing my plan”*
- “...the break-even analysis spreadsheet”*
- “I found the cash-flow forecast exercises useful”*

#### Workshops 1 and 2 – differences and feedback

Satisfaction data was collected at the end of each workshop. Results suggest that Workshop 1 met participants’ needs very well and its content was considered highly relevant. Results for Workshop 2 were slightly lower, though the majority of participants still said it met or exceeded expectations.

Figure 20 - Evaluation dashboard feedback



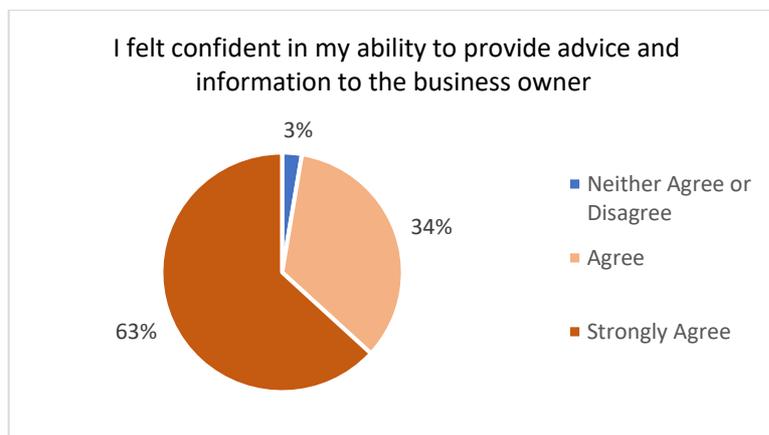
The quality of the speakers was considered very high at Workshops 1 and 2.

Participants also highly appreciated the more tailored, probing approach that **mentoring sessions** provided, and the outside view given to their business by mentors. The ability to talk about their business in everyday, non-technical language was also valued:

*“Everything was described in practical ‘no-brainer’ terms”*

In response to how the workshops could be improved, respondents focussed primarily on how much they enjoyed the sessions and suggested having more of them, and over a longer period of time.

Figure 21 – Mentors’ confidence in providing advice to the business owner – mentor survey



97% of mentors reported feeling confident in the advice that they were providing, and confident that the business owner seemed willing to take advice from them.

These results were higher than any other response in the mentor survey.

Participants also valued the **networking** between the women, and between participants and their mentors.

*“...the mentoring and connecting with other business owners”*

*“Listening to other people talk about their experiences and using financial language and being able to ask questions”*

*“The honest sharing of other participants’ challenges and fears”*

Considering the most significant changes occurred in relation to knowledge, skills and attitudes, this would suggest the ‘curriculum’ or workshop content is of a high quality.

It would be useful to consider areas where less change occurred to determine how those areas of content could be improved in the future so as to deliver greater change. Alternatively, it may be the case that such content receives less focus if the intervention remains relatively small (only a couple of workshops). For example, some areas where less change occurred could not be predicted to alter in such a short timeframe. Financial behaviours and practices require more concerted effort over longer periods of time.

## 7. Annexes

### 7.1. Annex 1 – List of highly significant changes (p-value < 0.001) and significant changes (p-value < 0.05)

Significant and Highly significant changes		p-values	
Survey Category	Survey question	Sometimes and above	Most of time or above
Break-even & planning ahead	20. I know how to implement the actions required to achieve my desired business profits and sales targets	0.0000	0.0000
Break-even & planning ahead	19. I am confident I know the break-even level of sales required to cover my operating costs	0.0000	0.0001
Break-even & planning ahead	22. I make provisions for superannuation each month	0.0500	N/A
Break-even & planning ahead	21. I make regular provisions for GST, taxes and loan repayments	0.0205	N/A
Budgeting & financial reports	8. I know how much money I require to create the business and lifestyle I desire	0.0000	0.0000
Budgeting & financial reports	10. I know how to prepare financial reports, including profit-and-loss statements and balance sheets.	0.0002	0.0010
Budgeting & financial reports	41. I use cash-flow projections to understand my business cashflow shortfalls and high points	0.0174	N/A
Budgeting & financial reports	9. I avoid budgeting	0.0195	N/A
Budgeting & financial reports	11. I have an effective bookkeeping system in place	N/A	0.0190
Earnings	16. I have a clear income target	0.0000	0.0000
Earnings	12. I know the cost of my family expenses	0.0000	0.0000
Earnings	13. I know the fixed expenses of my business	N/A	0.0000
Earnings	17. I have an annual sales target	0.0002	0.0000
Earnings	14. I know the variable costs of my business	0.0025	0.0000
Earnings	15. I put aside a percentage of profit to grow my business	0.0255	0.0345

Finances and wellbeing	2. I know how to plan and structure the financial elements of my business	0.0000	0.0000
Finances and wellbeing	5. I pay wages to myself on a regular basis	0.0094	N/A
Finances and wellbeing	3. I fear my business will fail	0.0192	0.0149
Finances and wellbeing	4. I can pay my bills easily	N/A	0.0307
Finances and wellbeing	1. I feel confident in how I manage my business	N/A	0.0126
Financial Management	38. I allocate regular time to reviewing financial reports e.g. Profit & Loss Statement; Balance Sheets; Debtors Report; Aged Creditors Report; Daily Sales Analysis	0.0000	0.0012
Financial Management	40. I use a Financial Management Strategy – such as having pricing and stock management policies and payment terms to guide my business practice	0.0000	N/A
Financial Management	39. I have simple systems in place to know when financial issues arise and to provide meaningful financial records to my accountant	0.033	N/A
Financial Management	36. I measure how my business is performing over time, e.g. through Key Performance indicators (KPIs)	0.0381	0.0271
Planning for the future	42. I treat the wages I pay myself with the same level of importance as my other wage & bill responsibilities	0.0019	N/A
Point of difference	32. I know where I want my products and services to be positioned in the wider market (e.g. premium, medium or lower end)	0.0063	N/A
Point of difference	33. I am able to justify my prices to buyers easily	N/A	0.0025
Point of difference	31. I am confident I know what consumers are prepared to pay for my product/services	0.0201	N/A
Pricing	28. I am confident in how I have costed my time	0.0000	0.0004
Pricing	27. I understand how my pricing, speciality, skill set and reputation compares to my competitors	0.0005	N/A
Pricing	29. When pricing my products and services, I consider the profit margins of others in the distribution chain; the price manufacturers sell; and the prices consumers are prepared to pay.	0.0209	0.0005

## 7.2. Annex 3 – List of metro and regional locations where workshops were held – by Local Government Area

### **Metro locations**

- Moonee Valley (x 2)
- Banyule
- Moreland
- Whitehorse
- Brimbank
- Yarra Ranges

### **Regional locations**

- Geelong
- Golden Plains
- Hamilton
- Latrobe
- Leongatha

### 7.3. Annex 4 – Key Evaluation Questions and sub-questions

Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Evaluation Questions
<b>KEQ 1: How effective were the tools and mentoring for Participants to build their knowledge and skills?</b>	a) Were participants able to create meaningful budgets?
	b) Were participants able to establish realistic KPIs?
	c) What other knowledge and skills did the participants gain from the training and mentoring?
<b>KEQ 2: What was the degree of attitudinal and confidence change in participants?</b>	a) To what extent did participants feel more comfortable with financial terminology/tools?
	b) To what extent were participants feeling more empowered to create financial independence?
<b>KEQ 3: To what degree have the financial management practices of participants changed from commencement of the Program?</b>	a) What has changed in how regularly and thoroughly participants are monitoring/managing their finances?
	b) Are participants using financial reporting tools to adjust business activity on a regular basis?
	c) How else have participants practices changed?
<b>KEQ 4: To what extent did the project change the financial capability of the participants?</b>	a) What has changed in how regularly participants are paying themselves?
	b) Have participants commenced or increased payments to a superannuation fund, or made any other personal (i.e. not business) investments which would contribute to their financial security?
	c) What were the improvements, if any, in business cash-flow and profits over the six-month period? To what extent do the participants believe their involvement in the Program contributed to this?
<b>KEQ 5: How efficient was the Program?</b>	a) How many women participated in the training/mentoring? What percentage completed the full Program?
	b) What was the cost per participant?
	c) What was women’s feedback on the workshops?

## 8. Appendixes attached

### **Evaluation tools**

- 8.1. Participant profile
- 8.2. Pre-Workshop 1 (baseline survey) & post-Workshop 2 participant survey
- 8.3. Evaluation dashboard instruction sheet
- 8.4. Mentor survey
- 8.5. End-of-program survey (upon completion of Program)