BOOSTING COWORKING PROGRAM

FINAL PROGRAM REPORT - JULY 2022

Prepared by: Danielle Storey
Chief Executive Officer
Eastern Innovation Business Centre Ltd

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Boosting Coworking Program (the Program) aimed to address the issue of social isolation that increased in the community during and following the Covid 19 pandemic. The Program was led by Eastern Innovation Business Centre Ltd (Eastern Innovation) working in partnership with the newly established peak industry body, Flexible Workspace Australia Ltd (FWA). It was delivered between August 2021 and July 2022.

The Program was supported by the Eastern Metropolitan Partnership (EMP), an advisory group established by the Victorian Government. The Partnership works with local communities to engage directly with state and local governments and advise the Victorian Government of the top priorities for jobs, services and infrastructure across the region. The advice becomes part of the government's decision-making processes.

The EMP covers the local government areas of Manningham, Maroondah, Knox, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges and all six councils were actively engaged in the Program.

The Program was delivered after Victorians had lived with It was developed during a time when it looked like restrictions were finishing, instead two further periods of lockdown followed.

The Program promoted coworking as a flexible alternative to the community's working conditions. This was based on the hypothesis that coworking spaces provide options for regional workforce patterns to normalise in a post-pandemic environment.

The Program objectives were to provide two separate streams:

» A stream to support six Eastern local governments to design and action a trial pop-up location or research of their choice with funding of $3,000 to support the research or implement coworking spaces with the aim of reinforcing 20-minute neighbourhoods and revitalising activity centres. The support also included an education workshop on the topic of pop-up coworking.

» A second stream promoted the use of coworking to the local working community and encouraged them to try a local coworking space through a voucher scheme that provided a discount on fees. The coworking voucher stream was delivered independently of the council stream.

Whilst a challenge for delivery, the response to the pandemic has shaped new ways of working. Values for a balanced life working close to or from home, connected to community and with access to local amenities have come to the fore. Coworking matches these values and supports many changing needs and emerging ways of working and living.

The deep engagement with councils, coworking providers and community during the program provided a wealth of new learning and data for the Victorian Government, for Flexible Workspace Australia and for the coworking spaces. The challenges faced during delivery also brought lessons - and opportunities to innovate.

THE OUTCOMES

Pre-Workshop Research

Prior to the workshop held for council partners, research was undertaken to understand councils' coworking initiatives and priorities.

The research showed that supporting resident workers through the pandemic and through weather events was a priority for all participating councils. Most were aware of coworking options in their local government area. Half had already investigated the set-up of coworking spaces and some had already identified a particular space to deliver pop-up coworking. Half of the councils had also identified a target market to occupy the space. See Appendix 5.

To gather content for the council workshop to inform the discussion, Flexible Workspace Australia also asked six active coworking leaders a series of questions to uncover the potential for local governments to deliver and lead pop-up coworking.

The sentiment of those interviewed was that whilst local government organisations had an important role to play in delivering pop-up coworking for their niched target sectors, they were currently not well resourced with the people or the funds to deliver spaces for extended periods of time. Exceptions to this were evident in some LGAs.

Responses to the following questions were analysed and worked into the content of the Pop-up Coworking workshop delivered in August 2021:

1. What do you think the state of market related to coworking by councils?
2. What (target) markets do you think councils can excel in?
3. What ideal venues do you think councils could use for pop-up coworking?
4. What do you think councils wish they'd known (about coworking)?
5. What hard infrastructure do pop-up coworking spaces need?
6. What soft infrastructure do pop-up coworking spaces need?
7. What creative collaborations have you seen between councils and commercial operators?

Anonymised answers and a summary of each question are detailed in Appendix 6.

Due to a pandemic lockdown the workshop for councils, originally planned to be face-to-face, was held fully online and recorded.

The Workshop

All six councils participated actively and enthusiastically in the workshop. A library provider and an economic development professional from a council outside the region also attended the workshop.

Support Funding for Diverse Coworking Initiatives

Each council was invited to apply for $3000 funding following the workshop. Five councils took up the offer and submitted a grant application.

Each chose a different method to provide or support coworking

1. a Community House pop-up location
2. a Library and Living and Learning pop-up location following recent weather events
3. the exploration of a retail store lease and retail activation pop-up location
4. a floorspace expansion of an already full permanent coworking location to accommodate casual and pop-up coworking, and
5. a refresh of a closed pop-up coworking location to enhance regional recovery initiatives.

The sixth allocation of funding was diverted to support the creation of an online portal to deliver the workshop and hold additional resources.

Boosting Coworking Portal

A pop-up coworking portal was identified as being a requirement to support the Project. A portal was created to support the workshop and was further developed using content from the online recording of the workshop. The portal (https://www.25eight.academy/courses/fwa-boosting-coworking-program) features:

» the workshop recording split into 3-4 minute segments

» resources for council officers to learn about the fundamentals of coworking such as

» editable worksheets

» ecosystem mapping tools

» impact and infrastructure lists

» workshop slides

» a coworking in retail environment report

» quizzes to support information retention

The portal also contains content about the specifics of pop-up coworking and helps users understand the commercialisation of coworking spaces. Overall, the portal aimed to aid officer research and inform strategic plans and frameworks.

It was further tested and is considered a very successful outcome of the Program.

"The Pop-up Coworking Portal was a surprise and a delight. It offered a variety of perspectives on how to deliver pop-up coworking and asked questions to consolidate the research we have been doing on delivering coworking across our region. It also helped us understand how to leverage partnerships."

Tavis Vallance, Coordinator Partnerships & Innovation, City of Boroondara

Vouchers for Workers

This stream of the Program allocated 350 vouchers valued at $100 for workers to try coworking in what was anticipated to be a release from pandemic conditions in October 2021.

The pandemic continued to have extended lockdowns, health orders, health precautions, as well as holiday periods and had a strong impact on both the online redemption and the use of vouchers throughout the Program. The holiday period (21/22 Summer school holidays) was the first holiday period in two years when families were allowed to travel. This was also a period that had strict vaccination requirements, social distancing restrictions and mask wearing requirements. All these factors combined to result in a low response to coworking throughout the entire Program promotional period.

167 vouchers were redeemed online and 78 were actually used across five coworking spaces.

Should this Program be repeated in future, it is likely that the vouchers would be claimed and utilised in much higher numbers.

Each of the voucher applicants were surveyed when they applied for the voucher. When asked for their home and work postcodes, responses were recorded with 118 workers usually working in the same postcode as their home, 34 travelled to another postcode and 22 didn't provide either one or both of their home and work postcodes.

The most frequently stated reason for wanting to cowork was to get out of the house. The most frequently stated answer to how the pandemic had affected the way they work was remote working or working from home.

Some of the workers who redeemed the vouchers were also surveyed after their first use of their chosen coworking space. See Appendix 7.

They were asked:

» Why they decided to try coworking

» What services they used

» How likely they are to cowork again, and

» How much the voucher influenced their decision to cowork.

The most common reason to decide to cowork was that they were tired of working from home (during Covid) and wanted to get out of home office and wanted an office space option. This included needing somewhere away from the home office and/or somewhere to focus on tasks, as well as wanting a productive and inspiring space. Less than 15% of voucher users said they wouldn't cowork again and the balance indicated that they may cowork again.

Over two thirds of the participants who completed the survey had not tried coworking before. Of those participants, 14 were women, 7 were men and for 3, their gender is unknown. Of the 13 who had tried coworking before close to two thirds were men, which reinforces the slight trend to more women trying coworking for the first time.

Funding Reallocation

Some funding from the voucher stream (from unallocated vouchers) was diverted back to the council pop-up coworking stream to further support the participating Councils.
This funded:

» a future roundtable workshop to identify leaders across a local government area (LGA) to further develop relationships and report the learnings of the day. The workshop has the potential for the future development of commercial coworking spaces and show how councils can support those developments.

» the provision of heating and cooling for the previously funded coworking space in the neighbourhood house.

» business coaching sessions to provide 'business health checks', mentors and sounding boards for the businesses and subsidised flu vaccinations for the coworkers to increase their wellbeing and limit the time they lose in business through sickness. They also engaged a wellness expert to provide massage therapy for wellbeing.

» one LGA's space also aimed to establish a 'business owner's support group' for coworkers to share ideas and issues relating to all things business ownership, undertaken in a relaxed setting with light refreshments.

» additional information added to the Retail Pop-up Coworking Fact Sheet, see Appendix 8.

» a celebration video.

Celebration

Funding was re-allocated to deliver a video celebrating the Program. It was commissioned to celebrate the voucher stream of the Program showcasing the experiences of four of the participating coworking spaces.

» BizHub at Realm

» Box Hill Institute - Helen Buckingham OAM Innovation Centre Lilydale

» Eastern Innovation

» Waterman Centres – Eastland

The video outlines and celebrates the Program and its funding partner, Metropolitan Partnerships and Flexible Workspace Australia. It also explains coworking and the experience of coworking in a post-pandemic environment from the perspective of the peak body, the coworking spaces and the coworkers themselves.

Overwhelmingly, the coworkers interviewed for the video celebrated the benefits and results they had achieved as a direct result of attending a coworking space near to their home. They expressed significant benefit to better business results, better work-life balance and better mental health outcomes as a result of interaction with other, like-minded people.

It is intended that this video will be used by:

» Flexible Workspace Australia to explain coworking to workers and stakeholders

» Metropolitan Partnerships to celebrate the work of the Eastern Partnership, and

» The participating coworking spaces to celebrate their involvement.

Further Developments

Other government departments have expressed an interest in the delivery of coworking vouchers to support their delivery of programs to innovators, entrepreneurs and priority cohorts.

The learnings from this Program will assist in FWA and all Project partners to deliver strong results in the future for small businesses through supporting the growing the important ecosystem of flexible workspaces.

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

The Main Challenges

Pop-up Coworking for Councils

The Program highlighted:

» Councils value the opportunity for their community that coworking presents

» Councils need on the ground support to boost coworking

» Pop-up coworking needs to align with Council Economic Development Plans

Most (5 out of 6 councils) Councils applied for the funding for pop-up coworking initiatives. However, each reported that more time and more resources were needed to design and deliver effective programs for their communities.

A few months was not enough time to ask Councils to apply for funding and deliver a comprehensive program, especially during a pandemic when their core service delivery was already challenging. Every Council reported a lack of human resources affecting their ability to commit extensive resources to the Program due to other pandemic related response and r ecovery initiatives.

Councils need approximately 12 months from inception to completion to deliver new programs that are not already in their Council or Economic Development Plans.

It is recommended that specific roles in councils be resourced to explore coworking or flexible working initiatives including the delivery of pop-up spaces, the delivery of permanent spaces or partnerships with commercial spaces to do either.

Voucher Program

The voucher program highlighted:

» Flexibility is needed in timing in an uncertain climate

» The coworking spaces had competing priorities

» The participating coworkers had competing priorities

» Community organisations need additional time to integrate new programs into existing frameworks

» An aggregator partner needs to be engaged in future programs

» Effective and connected marketing partnerships are required

» Existing coworkers wanted to be included

The Program needed more communication partners who have consistent access to the target audience of workers. Delivery of the Program required more time in the early implementation phase to individually meet the various requirements of each Councils' marketing processes.

It is evident that the pandemic significantly impacted the number of workers who redeemed vouchers. A post pandemic environment, with the right communication partners is expected to significantly increase worker participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report shows the value of coworking and demonstrates learnings of how coworking can be expanded, with support from key stakeholders.

It is recommended that further coworking initiatives be supported by all levels of Government to support businesses and workers to experience the benefits of coworking, including business growth, better work-life balance and person-to-person connections that support better mental health outcomes.

It is recommended that further rollout of similar programs is undertaken to support businesses to grow and increase opportunities for individuals to work locally. This could require strategic assistance for councils to continue and improve their capacity to support their local workers and priority cohorts.

Pop-up Coworking for Councils

It is recommended:

» every council be given the opportunity to access the Pop-up Coworking Portal to reinforce 20-minute neighbourhoods and revitalise activity centres with access to coworking spaces for local workers

» the collaborative development of the Pop-up Coworking Portal be continued

» a two-staged approach to supporting councils to deliver coworking initiatives is taken, separating the councils from those that are still researching coworking and those that are ready to deliver coworking.

Information Portal

It is recommended:

» the portal is made available to councils across Victoria and Australia to encourage and support continued localised coworking initiatives

» the portal is further resourced and updated including further local studies, case studies (written or filmed) and deeper research

» the portal is continued to be promoted by the coworking peak body, Flexible Workspace Australia and other partners.

Improved Council Capacity

It is recommended that:

» Councils are better funded to resource the people to research, plan, execute or partner with others in the execution of pop-up coworking initiatives.

Voucher Program

It is recommended that future programs:

» give coworking spaces more time

» have clear instructions must be delivered to the coworking spaces

» have a funded resource for the coworking spaces to dedicate time to a voucher program

» use an aggregator partner to issue the vouchers, to work with the coworking and to run the voucher registration process

» have an expiry date on the voucher use

» include priority cohorts and other service providers in each program but give them more time.

It is recommended that coworking voucher programs be delivered in specific regions, or across specific cohorts, such as women or priority cohorts to continue to introduce workers to the positive benefits of coworking.

For similar programs in future, communication partners should include organisations that have direct access into businesses and to workers.

BOOSTING COWORKING
IN DETAIL

INTRODUCTION

The following information details the Boosting Coworking Program in full and includes extended information, survey results and reports.

The Weekend Australian quotes Brad Krasukopf, co-Chair of Flexible Workspace Australia, the peak body for flexible and coworking spaces, saying,

"…the coworking sector is on the up as employers opt for flexible workplace arrangements and employees decide they don't want to work from home all the time." [04 Jun 2022]

The Boosting Coworking Program was devised as a response to the shifts in the way people work during and following the Covid-19 pandemic. Extended lockdowns enabled many workers to experience working from home successfully. Once lockdowns ended, workers wanted more flexibility in where and how they worked to stay healthy and to achieve better work-life balance. Employers were forced to embrace remote working during the pandemic and have continued to accommodate the decentralisation of their workforce to meet workforce health needs and to win the current war for talent.

Coworking spaces provide options for workforce patterns to normalise in a post-pandemic environment. They provide regular or occasional options for a growing number of people who prefer to work close to where they live but still need access to social connection opportunities and a sense of an office community. Coworking responds to the spike of loneliness and social isolation experienced in communities while people were required to work and educate from home for extended periods of time.

The Partners and Participants

The Boosting Coworking Program was led by Eastern Innovation Business Centre Ltd (EIBC Ltd / Eastern Innovation) working in partnership with the newly established peak industry body, Flexible Workspace Australia Ltd (FWA). It was delivered between August 2021 and July 2022.

The Program was supported by the Eastern Metropolitan Partnership (EMP), an advisory group established by the Victorian Government. The Partnership is a mechanism for local communities to engage directly with state and local governments and advise the Victorian Government of the top priorities for jobs, services and infrastructure across the region. The advice becomes part of the government's decision-making processes.

The EMP covers the local government areas of Manningham, Maroondah, Knox, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges and all six councils were actively engaged in the Program.

The Program was delivered after Victorians had lived with 18 months of the Covid pandemic and extended lockdowns. It was developed during a time when it looked like restrictions were finishing, instead two further periods of lockdown followed.

The Program was designed to support the changes to these workforce patterns, to investigate the opinions of the users, to support space activation, placemaking and 20-minute neighbourhood initiatives, deliver community development

outcomes and social innovation in the Eastern Metropolitan Partnership region.

It included the Councils areas of:

»   Manningham City Council

»   Maroondah City Council

»   Knox City Council

»   Monash City Council

»   Yarra Ranges Shire Council

»   Whitehorse City Council

This Program aligned with the Eastern Metropolitan Partnerships priorities of:

»   Regional resilience and economic recovery

»   Social inclusion

AIM & OBJECTIVES

The aim of the Program was to address the issue of social isolation in the community. The objectives were:

» to support local governments to design or trial pop-up coworking as a place activation (Pop-up Coworking for Councils)

» to support local governments to create more options for pop-up coworking by providing them with guidance, support and a subsidy towards resources (Pop-up Coworking for Councils)

» to provide the local working community with vouchers to experience coworking for a discounted price. (Vouchers for Workers)

Pop-up Coworking for Councils

A pop-up coworking workshop aimed to support six Eastern Councils with guidance and funding to develop or enhance a pop-up coworking space in their municipality. A workshop was to be designed to provide the education and a small grant of $3,000 was aimed to fund programs or supporting infrastructure. Technical, educational and program support and expertise was to be provided by the coworking and flexible space industry peak body, Flexible Workspace Australia Ltd and its active coworking space members.

All six Councils in the Eastern region (Knox, Manningham, Yarra Ranges, Maroondah, Monash and Whitehorse) were to

be approached to see if they expressed an interest in providing pop-up coworking spaces as a place-activation strategy.

The aims were aimed to help them to:

» gather data to support their own 20-minute neighbourhood initiatives,

» activate under-utilised spaces, and

» generate economic benefit data.

The customised workshop was to be researched and designed by Flexible Workspace Australia to:

» safely test assumptions

» develop frameworks for future flexible workspace development

» design ways to connect further with local workers and companies, and

» learn from experienced leaders of existing coworking spaces

Voucher Program for Workers

The voucher program was designed to enable local coworking spaces to subsidise the price of coworking for workers. It was aimed to be targeted at adults aged between 25-54, Seniors (anyone aged 54+), men, women and socio-economically disadvantaged residents. Preference was to be given to residents who had been affected and isolated by work from home practices as a result of the pandemic and who wanted to experience coworking.

The Stream was also aimed to provide options of place to work safely away from domestic violence.

Existing coworking spaces were to be located in the Eastern Metropolitan region and be registered with Flexible Workspace Australia. They were to be approached to participate in the Program. Contractual arrangements were to be designed using an Expression of Interest process.

The participating coworking spaces to be approached included:

» Waterman – Eastland (Ringwood)

» Waterman - Caribbean Park (Scoresby)

» HMWORK (Nunawading)

» Box Hill Institute (Lilydale)

» Hills HQ (Tecoma)

» Eastern Innovation (Mulgrave)

» Cire – (Yarra Junction)

» Croydon Coworking Space (Croydon)

» BizHub (Ringwood)

It was aimed that participating coworking spaces be a mix of commercial, council run, council supported and not-for-profit businesses and were to be a mix of large and small coworking spaces and businesses.

Across the 9 locations, 350 x $100 coworking vouchers were to be made available for the local community to register for and claim for the participating coworking space. These vouchers were not designed to cover the full costs for participants, which depended on what services they wanted to access.

The stream also aimed to support coworking space operators recover from the pandemic by providing new customers.

Eight stages of delivery were designed:

» Stage 1 Preparation

» Stage 2 Marketing Preparation

» Stage 3 Document Preparation

» Stage 4 Engagement

» Stage 5 Campaign Launch

» Stage 6 Surveys

» Stage 7 Payment of Vouchers

» Stage 8 Reporting

KEY DELIVERABLES

The key deliverables were:

» Appointment of Delivery Partner: Flexible Workspace Australia Ltd

» Social media campaign plus in-kind support from Local Government

» Engagement with Councils

» Delivery of one Council popup workshop

» 350 x $100 vouchers to be distributed evenly amongst existing coworking operators who have registered with Flexible Workspace Australia

» $18,000 to be evenly distributed amongst participating councils

» Voucher management, distribution and webpage

» Coworking Month vouchers may be redeemed in November 2021 (pandemic permitting)

» Rebates/payments to coworking spaces and to participating Councils

» Data collection, data collation, report generation

» Financial Reporting

PROGRAM DELIVERY AND OUTCOMES

1. **Delivery Control of the Program**

   The Program was controlled by Eastern Innovation Business Centre Ltd whose role and responsibility included:

   » Program planning

   » Program oversight

   » Financial management

   » Appointment of consultant for reporting

   » Payments to FWA, participating spaces, councils and other consultants

   » Reporting and financial governance

   » Draft report to PWG and final report.

2. **Project Working Group**

   A Project Working Group was established to contribute to the Program and consisted of:

   » Council representatives Helen Ruddell (Shire of Yarra Ranges) and Chris Zidak (City of Maroondah)

   » Samantha Davies, Platypus Coworking, Flexible Workspace Australia Program Manager

» Liz Ryan, Senior Program Officer, Office for Suburban Development

» Danielle Storey, industry representative

The responsibilities of the Project Working Group included program advice and guidance and workshop participation.

3. **Flexible Workspace Australia Ltd was appointed to deliver the Program.**

The Program was championed and delivered by Flexible Workspace Australia.

Flexible Workspace Australia was formed to be the peak body for the coworking and flexible workspace industry (the Industry) across all cities and regions of Australia. FWA aims to:

a. Raise awareness and understanding of the coworking and flexible workspaces sector

b. Provide support and education to members in respect of the day-to-day operation of coworking and flexible workspaces

c. Add value and credibility to its member spaces through accreditation

d. Represent the interests of members in dealings with governments, agencies and suppliers of space, products and services

e. Conduct research and policy development, collecting and disseminating relevant data to understand and represent the industry

f. Facilitate networking between the coworking and flexible workspace ecosystem in Australia and encouraging sharing through member and best practice forums.

The Boosting Coworking Program specifically supported Flexible Workspace Australia's goals to raise awareness of the coworking and flexible workspaces sector, to provide support and education to existing workspaces in the Program region, to represent coworking to Local and Victorian Governments and to conduct research and deliver data to understand and represent the industry.

Flexible Workspace Australia represents and supports over 80 coworking brands and over 250 spaces across Australia.

Flexible Workspace Australia was responsible for

» Program management

» Appointment of marketing contactors

» Distribution of digital marketing assets to councils and other advertising partners such as Metropolitan Partnerships

» Creation of a webpage and end user signup form

» Coordination of coworking space signup

» Communication with coworking spaces

» Research and information for the council workshop

» Feedback and reporting.
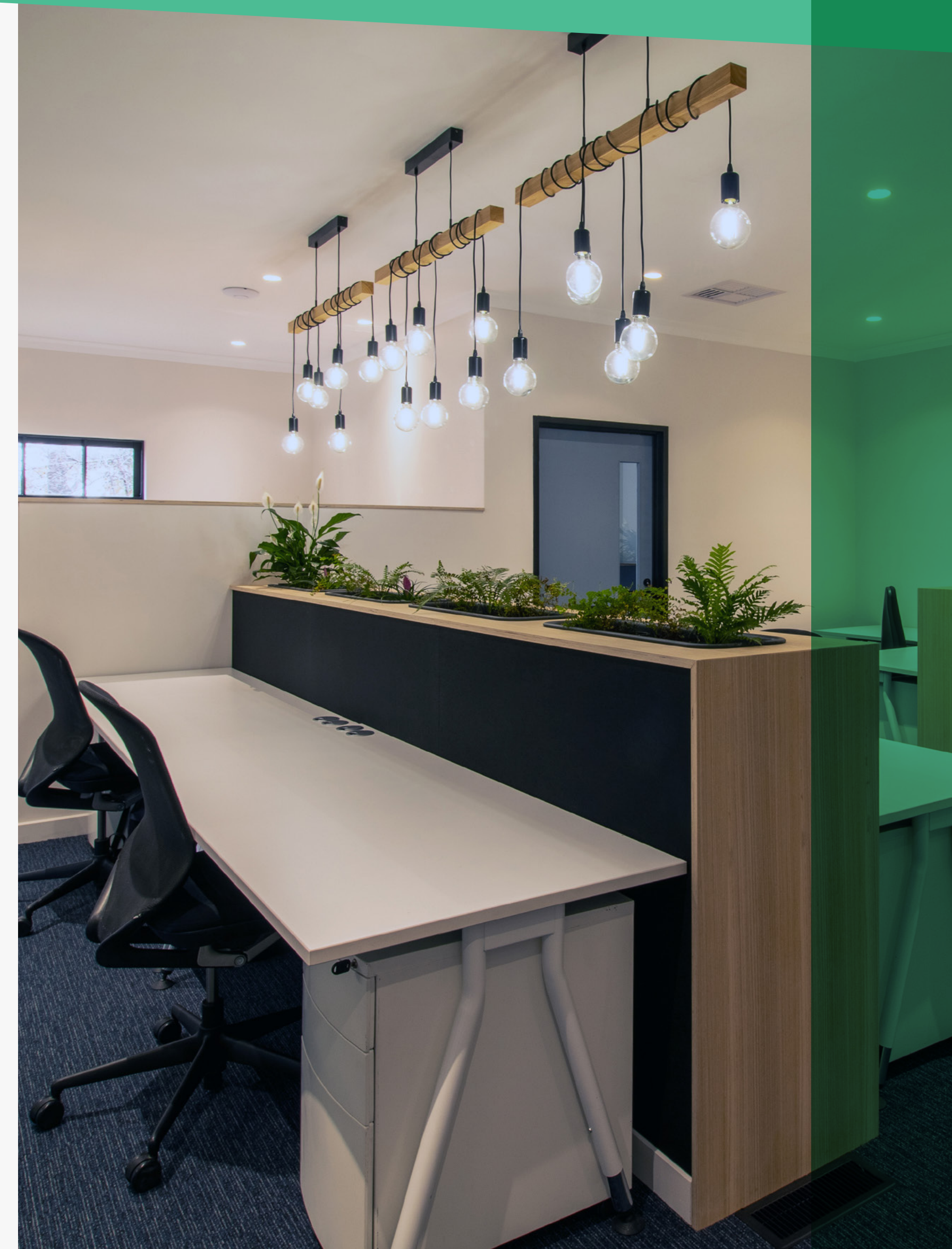
Benefits of Flexible Workspace Australia's delivery included:

» Ensuring that the coworking spaces were Members of the Association and therefore qualified and trusted organisations

» Ensuring that the coworking spaces felt supported by their trusted peak body

» The engagement of delivery contractors who owned and operated their own coworking spaces and therefore understood the Program and the needs of the coworking spaces and voucher users.

The Program also strengthened the capacity of the newly formed national peak body for coworking.

4. A social media campaign

A social media campaign was delivered through the appointment of a collaboration between Pop Media and Impactiv8. They provided all collateral to communicate the Program including a webpage for bookings and data-gathering, social tiles and sharable content. There were 1532 unique page views to the Boosting Coworking Program webpage and 432 unique pages views to the Boosting Coworking Program Voucher Application webpage.

	Page Views	Unique Page Views	Time on Page
Boosting Coworking Program	1758	1532	2:04 - 65% Bounce Rate
Boosting Coworking Program Voucher Application	504	432	2:02
Boosting Coworking Program Worker Application Thanks	167	158	1:09
Boosting Coworking Program - Contact details for participating workspaces	7	5	2:06
TOTAL	2436	2127	N/A

Table 1 Voucher Program Website Views www.flex.org.au

Key outcomes included content shared on

» the peak body's social pages,

» local Councils social pages and eDMs

» Office for Suburban Development's social pages

» participating coworking spaces eDMs.
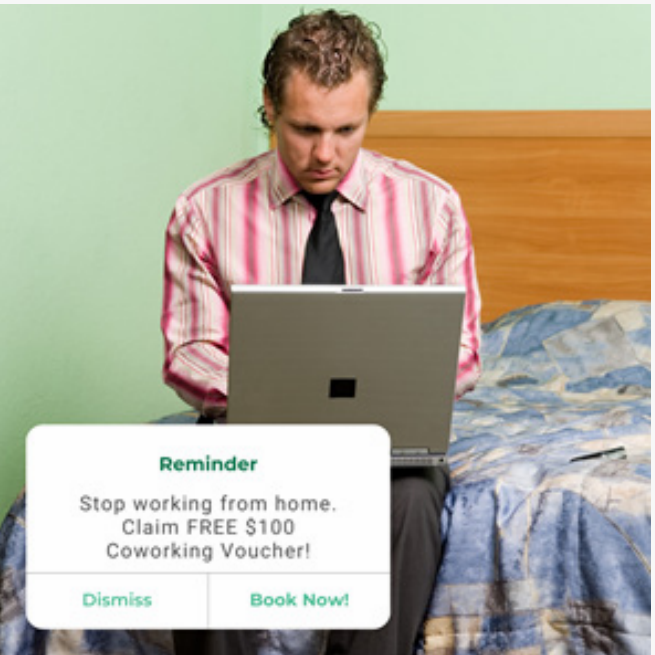
5. Building the capacity of councils - training and portal:

Each Councils' Economic Development Teams were engaged with to garner their interest pop-up coworking and their interest in attending a workshop on pop-up coworking.

Six people were interviewed to gather information to populate the workshop. A workshop for councils was held on 26th August 2021 with eleven people attending online.

Key outcomes included:

» attendance by all Eastern Councils

» additional attendance by a Council in another region, one library and Living and Learning location

» the workshop became the content and foundation for an online learning program housed in a learning management system

  • the platform continues to be accessed and referenced by each of the participating Councils

  • it is an ongoing and continually developed resource with worksheets and other information including surveys https://www.25eight.academy/courses/fwa-boosting-coworking-program

» the workshop also featured coworking operators in the workshop to deliver real life experiences and also included a retail specialist who delivered information around commercial leases for pop-up shops.

6. Resourcing councils for pop-up coworking

Further assets were (and are continuing to be) added to the portal as a result of the variations of the Program, including the retail pop-up report for Knox Council and a future stakeholder roundtable for City of Yarra Ranges.

The portal was tested by another Council outside of the region and considered a comprehensive resource rich with information and insights into helping Councils deliver pop-up coworking initiatives.

7. Voucher Program to trial Coworking:

Initially 350 vouchers were offered for people to trial coworking across 9 coworking hubs. This stream of the Program was impacted by the pandemic and restrictions and the uncertainty that followed. Ultimately, 78 were redeemed across five centres with positive responses reported by the participating centres. Four centres either did not receive or could not accommodate any bookings from the Program.

VOUCHER PROGRAM OUTCOME

	Registered	Claimed	% claimed
Waterman - Eastland	47	22	47%
Waterman - Caribbean Park	7	0	0%
HMWRK	22	0	0%
Box Hill Institute	12	3	25%
Hills HQ	16	9	56%
Eastern Innovation	20	14	70%
Cire - Yarra Junction	2	0	0%
Croydon Coworking Space	4	0	0%
BizHub	46	30	65%
TOTAL	**176**	**78**	**44%**

Table 2 Voucher Program outcomes

Funds were repurposed from the remaining vouchers and applied in a number of initiatives to strengthen and embed coworking across the region. These are detailed in the following section.

8. **Data collection, collation and report**

Data was collected from the application form as well as after the workers had tried coworking with a survey at the venue.

When asked their home and work postcodes, responses were recorded with 118 workers usually working in the same postcode as their home, 34 travelled to another postcode and 22 didn't provide either one or both of their home and work postcodes.

The most frequently stated reason for wanting to cowork was to get out of the house. The most frequently stated answer to how the pandemic had affected the way they work was remote working or working from home.

Some of the workers who redeemed the vouchers were surveyed after their first use of their chosen coworking space. See Appendix 7.

They were asked:

» Why they decided to try coworking

» What services they used

» How likely they are to cowork again, and

» How much the voucher influenced their decision to coworking.

The most common reason to decide to cowork was that they were tired of working from home (during Covid) and wanted to get out of home office and wanted an office space option. This included needing somewhere away from the home office and/or somewhere to focus on tasks, as well as wanting a productive and inspiring space. Less than 15% of voucher users said they wouldn't cowork again and the balance indicated that they may will cowork again.

Over two thirds of the participants who completed the survey, had not tried coworking before. Of those participants, 14 were women, 7 were men and for 3 their gender is unknown. Of the 13 who had tried coworking before close to two thirds were men, which reinforces the slight trend to more women trying coworking for the first time.

Additional Initiatives to Boost Coworking

The pandemic provided challenges to program delivery but also opportunities. Where planned activities were unable to be delivered, funds were re-purposed and alternative actions were developed which strengthened the longer-term benefits delivered by the Program. These included:

» Development of the coworking portal

· made possible by repurposing $3000 that was not required by one council for a pop-up coworking space

» Production of a video to educate about coworking featured 4 businesses who were interviewed to celebrate their success through coworking and 4 participating coworking

space leaders as well as the Chair of Flexible Workspace Australia.

» Fact sheet on delivering pop-up coworking in retail spaces

  • made possible through repurposing funds from City of Knox's second allocation of funds

» Heating and cooling for Neighbourhood House (in City of Monash)

» Support to Bizhub (City of Maroondah) initiatives:

  • Business coaching sessions to provide 'business health checks' acting as a mentor and sounding board for the businesses.

  • Subsidised flu vaccinations for the Coworkers to increase their wellbeing and limit the time they lose in business through sickness.

  • Engagement of a wellness expert to provide massage therapy which they have used to great success as part of the BizHub coworking space.

  • Establishment of a 'business owner's support group' for coworkers to share ideas and issues relating to all things business ownership to be undertaken in a relaxed setting with light refreshments.

» Roadmap to support commercial and not-for-profit coworking across the Yarra Ranges

  • workshop to be delivered by Flexible Workspace Australia in September 2022 to identify the key leaders connected to commercial and not-for-profit coworking across the regions.

» Two of the contractors were paid additional fees to account for the extended work timeframe due to the extension of time workers had to redeem their vouchers. The vouchers on offer were reduced from 350 to 300 to fund the additional work of the contractors, incurred due to the extension of the redemption period from one month, November 2021, to include December 2021 to March 2022.

Key Event – Minister visit

Thirty businesses (approximately 50 people) attended the Victorian Minister for Suburban Development and Local Government, Shaun Leane's visit to one of the coworking spaces (Eastern Innovation) to launch the Program in February 2022.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

This Program was delivered after Victorians had lived with 18 months of the Covid pandemic and extended lockdowns and was developed during a time when it looked like restrictions were finishing. Two further periods of lockdown followed. Whilst a challenge for delivery the response to the pandemic has shaped new ways of working, value for a balanced life working close to or from home, connected to community and with access to local amenities. Coworking is in harmony and supports many of those new needs and emerging ways of working and living.

The deep engagement with Councils, coworking providers and community during the Program provided a wealth of new learning and data. The challenges faced during delivery also brought lessons and opportunities to innovate.

Learnings from Pop-up Coworking for Councils

Councils value the opportunity for their community that coworking presents

The participating Councils welcomed and supported the chance to learn more about coworking, understand the difference between a permanent space and a pop-up space and learn more about connecting people and communities to activate places and spaces.

Face-to-face workshops work best

Whilst the attendance and engagement rate of the virtual workshop was high, a virtual rather than face-to-face workshop meant that there was less of an opportunity to engage with questions or troubleshooting that would have occurred if everyone was face-to-face. The workshop was designed to educate on the benefits of pop-up coworking and how to implement but it also included a short discussion of the grant funding which wasn't applicable to all attendees resulting in some confusion on the grant funding process. This confusion created more work for the Program Manager and the Council grant applicants.

Councils need on the ground support to boost coworking

Feedback from attendees highlighted their desire for on-the-ground support and more opportunities to learn from others that have already implemented coworking initiatives. This was highlighted by the attendees' strong appetite for more time to be spent on the panel session. This request was out of scope, however, FWA representatives supported as much as they could with advice and the panelists offered to be available for further discussion.

There wasn't enough lead time for the Councils to organise the inclusion of external partners before the scheduled workshop

delivery date. The Councils who wanted to use different partners, such as a community house or commercial partner in the implementation of pop-up coworking, were bringing them in cold as they hadn't attended the workshop.

The grant funding was initially $3000 per Council. It was extended to $5000 at the end of the Program. It didn't meet the used or expected costs of implementation of a pop-up coworking space from a start-up stage and would only cover minimal infrastructure costs.

Pop-up coworking needs to align with Council plans

This Program and the challenges of minimal resources (both human and funding) highlighted the need for any pop-up coworking program to align with Council plans to ensure co-funded support for successful implementation.

Learning from the Vouchers for Workers

Flexibility in timing in an uncertain climate

The very first date for the launch of the voucher program was supposed to be September 2021 and was pushed to November 2021 due to uncertainty with Covid lockdowns. This was further extended to December 2021 after the lockdown had lifted.

A launch date in December coincided with school holidays and where previously there had been a strong application for the voucher, the conversion rate to redemption was low. To overcome this, FWA contacted the registrants by email and phone looking to re-engage possible participants. However, the majority of emails and calls were not answered or returned. Approximately 89 possible participants (52%) were ultimately not re-engaged.

Some coworking spaces didn't open as quickly as others as initially planned. For example, HMWRK didn't open until February 2022 because of internal constraints.

The coworking spaces had competing priorities

There was an unexpectedly high workload for the Program Manager in supporting each of the coworking spaces to understand the program and the reporting requirements.

Some of the coworking spaces didn't have dedicated program managers for the Boosting Coworking Voucher Program. Throughout the campaign FWA maintained the communication with the coworking spaces but response times varied. Add that the Program was delivered over a longer period of time than planned and budgeted for, this meant that the Program Manager was met with the coworking spaces' competing priorities of reopening with staff shortages and other issues related to pandemic response and recovery.

The participating coworkers had competing priorities

Overall, there was an eight-months delay before realistic delivery, due to the pandemic. There was a strong assumption that people would return to work in February 2022 when school began for the new year. This didn't happen. Families who had children back at school were continually isolating with Covid

outbreaks in their homes or their close contacts. This meant that small business owners and workers with children at school could not leave home to cowork.

Some of the workspaces reported that they called and emailed the people who had registered for vouchers but had no response from the worker. They continued to follow up and, in many cases, had no further contact.

Community organisations need additional time to integrate new programs into existing framework

The original Program Plan aimed to offer vouchers to people who were experiencing or recovering from domestic violence and a support agency was invited to participate in both the voucher and the pop-up coworking workshop. Whilst the support agency advised that the provision of coworking space was to be addressed in the future they had to decline participation in this Program due to a lack of resources (human resources and time) to design appropriate delivery framework.

Wide marketing partnerships are required

A wider range of partners are required to share the communications messaging for a successful outcome. The messaging also needs to be tailored, both in content and in presentation style to suit each individual partner. The extra time it takes to individually tailor messaging should be factored into the delivery of the marketing campaign.

When the Program was designed, a strong emphasis was placed on marketing messages being delivered by primarily by Councils and the participating coworking spaces.

Councils needed more time and even though the collateral was deemed "wonderful", delivery to the councils as a single group could not be done as each had different structures and processes. Work needed to be done in each region to understand the parameters so that collateral could be tailored better to suit those processes. In some cases, Economic Development departments also had their own communications channels.

It was noted that the Councils did the most promotion had a stronger response with the number of vouchers claimed and redeemed. One Council already runs a coworking space and therefore had ideal target market marketing messaging already in place.

Throughout the Program, the delivery contractors had to spend time delivering bespoke materials to each Council.

It is recommended that other partners be engaged to deliver the marketing and social messages instead, such as:

» Small Business Victoria

» Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

» Local Council Economic Development Units

» Business community influencers, (ie Kochie's Business Builders, Flying Solo, Her Business, etc.)

» Companies with a large business customer base, potentially bringing them on as sponsors or program partners (ie Xero).

Existing Coworkers wanted to be included

Existing flexible workers were disappointed that they cannot access the vouchers. An extension to allow them to try a flexible working product they hadn't used before (such as meeting rooms or hybrid hardware) might be a way to include all workers in a program.

As the vouchers did not have an expiry date by which they must book their seat/space it meant the vouchers couldn't be offered to other workers if they were not used.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Program delivered rich value and deserves to be delivered in other regions and in conjunction with other complementary programs. Below are recommendations to support further delivery and to support improved outcomes.

Every Council be given the opportunity to access the Pop-up Coworking Portal

It is strongly recommended that every Victorian Council be given the opportunity and funding to access the Boosting Coworking Pop-Up Coworking Portal to promote and support 20-minute neighborhood delivery, to support decentralisation and revitalise activity centres with access to coworking spaces for local workers.

Use of the portal will provide information, targeted resources and deliver education on the critical elements needed to deliver or support coworking.

A two-staged approach to supporting councils to deliver coworking initiatives

Councils are all at different stages of coworking initiative delivery. Identifying which councils are at which stage will allow a program to have better success.

Councils at stage one will be in the early stages of exploring coworking and will want to test their assumptions with micro pilots with the goal of creating business cases. Councils at stage one should have access the pop-up coworking portal and be able to refer back to the portal and to Flexible Workspace Australia regularly to draw on additional resources as their planning progresses.

This stage could include:

» access to all resources in the portal

» experienced consultative support through Flexible Workspace Australia

» the opportunity for further educational workshops

» research and program reports, and

» engagement with people who have already delivered coworking spaces.

Councils that are at stage two are ready to implement a pop-up (or permanent) coworking space and will likely have co-funding to action their business plan. Councils in stage two will likely need at least one year from grant opening to execute their program or project.

They will need access to additional funding and will:

» already know which business segment/s that they most want to target

» know where that cohort are most likely to meet

» have delivered micro pilots and data to support their plans

» have a strong database of potential participants (or key marketing partners who do), and

» have a plan to obtain resources to successfully execute their program or project.
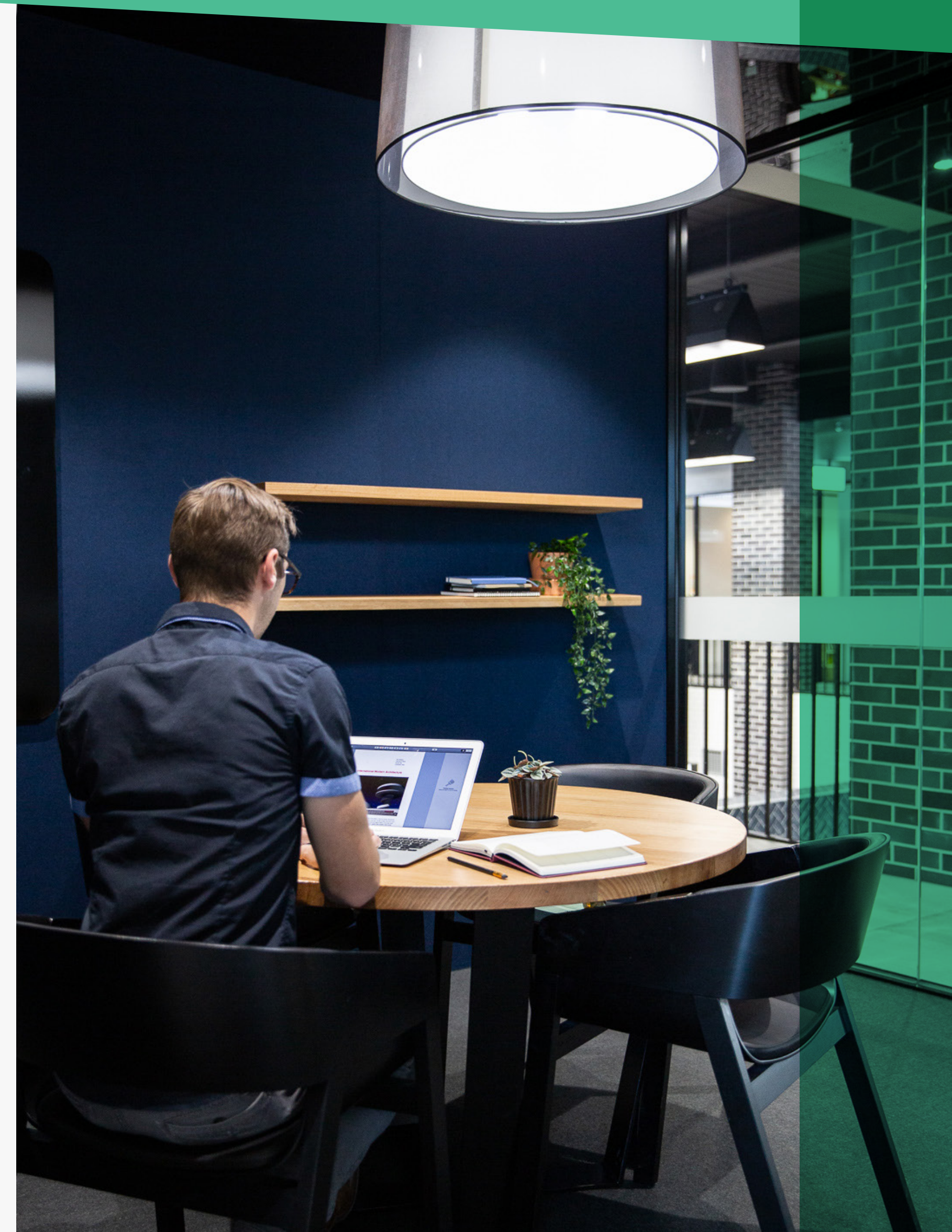
Continue the collaborative development of the Pop-up Coworking Portal

The Pop-Up Coworking Portal should be continued to be updated with resources to improve the research outcomes for all councils using the portal.

As Councils use the portal, reports, findings, learnings and results could be generously shared in the portal so that other Councils benefit from the insights and findings for their own planning and execution.

Flexible Workspace Australia should also continue to populate the portal with recordings, worksheets and learnings relevant to the delivery of Council pop-up coworking spaces.

Prioritise face to face engagement

Where possible and with health precautions in mind, it is recommended that introductory and funding information workshops are conducted in-person to address questions and create a better sense of Partner engagement.

Give more time to specific cohorts who want to deliver pop-up coworking

Programs aimed at specific cohorts (such as those impacted by domestic violence) need to have a longer lead time to coordinate with the relevant agencies to allow them time to consult people with lived experience and time to tailor the program to the needs of their organisation.

Coworking spaces need time too

Recommend a longer lead time to design and promote the program to ensure all coworking spaces are prepared and resourced, which will result in increased awareness and engagement from workers/potential participants.

It is recommended that any program is delivered outside of school holidays, with a 'get back to school, get back to work' style of campaign in February (or adapted to suit time of year).

Clear instructions must be delivered to the coworking spaces

Coworking spaces must engage in an information session with an experienced delivery partner, such as, Flexible Workspace Australia, prior to any program. The information session should deliver very clear instructions in a number of formats included printed and digital materials. The instructions should include advice on:

» who can register

» how the voucher can be actioned by the space and

» if the value of the voucher did or did not include GST

» how to report when the voucher had been used

» when and how they should invoice for reimbursement

Information workshops for participating coworking spaces should be, wherever possible, held face to face for higher engagement and interaction, questions and troubleshooting.

Fund a resource/s for the coworking spaces

If the coworking spaces are funded for resource support to administer or champion the program the success of the initiative will be improved with faster communication speed and better reporting. Resource support might be in the form a grant to support an additional human resource to manage the program.

Use an aggregator partner to run the voucher registration process

The process of registering for a coworking voucher for coworking should be handled by an approved and experienced aggregator. A coworking aggregator features an established platform that lists all participating coworking spaces and provides a user-friendly process for voucher claim and redemption. An aggregator will decrease the touchpoints for redemption of the vouchers, will simplify the process and increase participation.

Have an expiry date on voucher use

An expiry date by which a participant must book their seat/space will free the voucher up for other workers to use after that date. This is particularly important in an uncertain environment such as ongoing pandemic and health precautions.

Include priority cohorts and service delivery programs in each program

Recommend that any program offers access to priority cohorts, such as women, as evidenced by the data that the majority of cohort trying coworking for the first time were women.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 METROPOLITAN PARTNERSHIPS PRIORITIES

https://www.suburbandevelopment.vic.gov.au/metropolitan-partnerships/eastern-partnership

The Eastern Metropolitan Partnership is an advisory group established by the Victorian Government. The Partnership is a way for local communities to engage directly with state and local governments and advise the Victorian Government of the top priorities for jobs, services and infrastructure across the region. This advice will become part of the government's key decision-making processes.

The Eastern Partnership's vision is for a region with excellent connections between people, places and jobs.

The Partnership has six priority outcomes, informed by our engagement work with the communities, businesses, service providers and local governments of Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne:

» Regional Resilience and Economic Recovery: Support the social and economic recovery of the region in response to the impacts of the pandemic

» Regional Connectivity: Make it easier to get around the region especially by public and active transport

» Integrated Health & Social Services: Ensure easy, affordable, seamless access to the full range of services needed by the region's most vulnerable people

» Jobs for Youth: Improve the transition from secondary school to meaningful training and employment for the region's young people

» Social Housing: Ensure all people in the region have a safe and affordable place to live

» Social Inclusion: Address social isolation and loneliness across the region and provide opportunities for all members of the regional population to participate in community life

APPENDIX 2 KEY MILESTONES

Item	Original dates	Mid-term date variations	Final dates
Contract signing and funds transferred	June 2021		June 2021
Agreement signed with Flexible Workspace Australia	July 2021		July 2021
Selection and registration of participating providers	August 2021		August 2021
Social Marketing and communications collateral developed	July 2021	Initial collateral completed September 2022	Continued refinement of collateral through to March 2022
Local Government workshop	July – August 2021		26 August 2021
Launch of campaign	September 2021		October 2021
Coworking trial period	November 2021		November 21 – March 22 Inclusive
Rebate processing period	December 2021		January 2022 - March 2022
Financial audit and evaluation period	January 2022		July 2022
Draft report	February 2022	April 2022	July 2022
Approved draft report	March 2022	April 2022	July 2022
Final Report due	April 2022	April 2022	Aug 2022

APPENDIX 3 STAGED DELIVERY IN DETAIL

Stage	Detail	Approach	Outcome
Stage 1 Preparation	Contracts and scope finalised between Eastern Innovation and Flexible Workspace Australia (FWA) Appointment of FWA Program Manager Appointment of reporting consultant	Contractual	Acceptance Letter signed 13 May 2021 Grant Agreement signed 24 June 2021 Contracts were signed on 29 August 2021 and Samantha Davies appointed Program Manager on behalf of FWA Ltd.
Stage 2 Marketing Preparation	Engagement of Marketing / Social Media consultant Identification ideal target markets through an online workshop between PWG and EI Marketing plan	Contractual Workshop Documents	Impactive8 were appointed to promote the Program and create the marketing plan and Pop Media to create the collateral. A marketing workshop identified the ideal target market was identified as workers aged 25 - 65+ who had been impacted by work from home practices during the pandemic.
Stage 3 Document Preparation	Guidelines Terms and conditions Rules of Engagement	Documents	Documents were developed by FWA and created launched on the website in October 2021.
Stage 4 Engagement	Engagement with Council teams via council CEOs (as members of EMP). Engagement with existing coworking space managers Pop up coworking workshop delivery to Councils	Personal, via phone / email to be followed up with Expression of Interest online for workspaces to be involved and followed up by offers and contracts	All 6 council CEOs (Eastern Metropolitan Partnership Members) connected the program team with their Economic Development Teams. All 6 Council Economic Development teams expressed interest and 5 completed a survey. 9 workspaces expressed an interest to be involved Pop-up coworking workshop was delivered to 6 Councils in August 2021

APPENDIX 3 STAGED DELIVERY IN DETAIL (CONT'D)

Stage	Detail	Approach	Outcome
Stage 5 Campaign Launch	Landing page creation Email promotion Social media promotion Partner marketing Supporting email communications	Promotion through marketing partner using social media, paid social media and email as a strategy to engage the target audience to register and redeem a voucher In-kind promotion - Collateral provided to Councils and workspaces to promote to their community	Main landing page was created on FWA website (https://flex.org.au/boosting-coworking-voucher-program) with supporting landing pages through completion of the forms. Website visitors FWA promoted the campaign to its subscriber base on 30th September 2021 Facebook ad campaign ran from 3rd - 31st December 2021 with $178.06 spent across two ad sets. The campaign generated a reach of 2,745 resulting in 35 clicks 176 registered for vouchers and 78 were claimed
Stage 6 Surveys	Survey of worker participants Survey of participating coworking space managers Survey of Councils	Feedback survey emailed to attendees of the pop-up coworking workshop post workshop delivery Online surveys - applicants asked a series of questions as part of the application process, prior to receiving the voucher.	174 applicant responses were recorded with 118 usually working in the same postcode, 34 travelled to another postcode and 22 didn't provide either one or both of their home and work postcodes. The most frequently stated reason for wanting to cowork was to get out of the house The most frequently stated answer to how the pandemic had affected the way they work was remote working or working from home

APPENDIX 3 STAGED DELIVERY IN DETAIL (CONT'D)

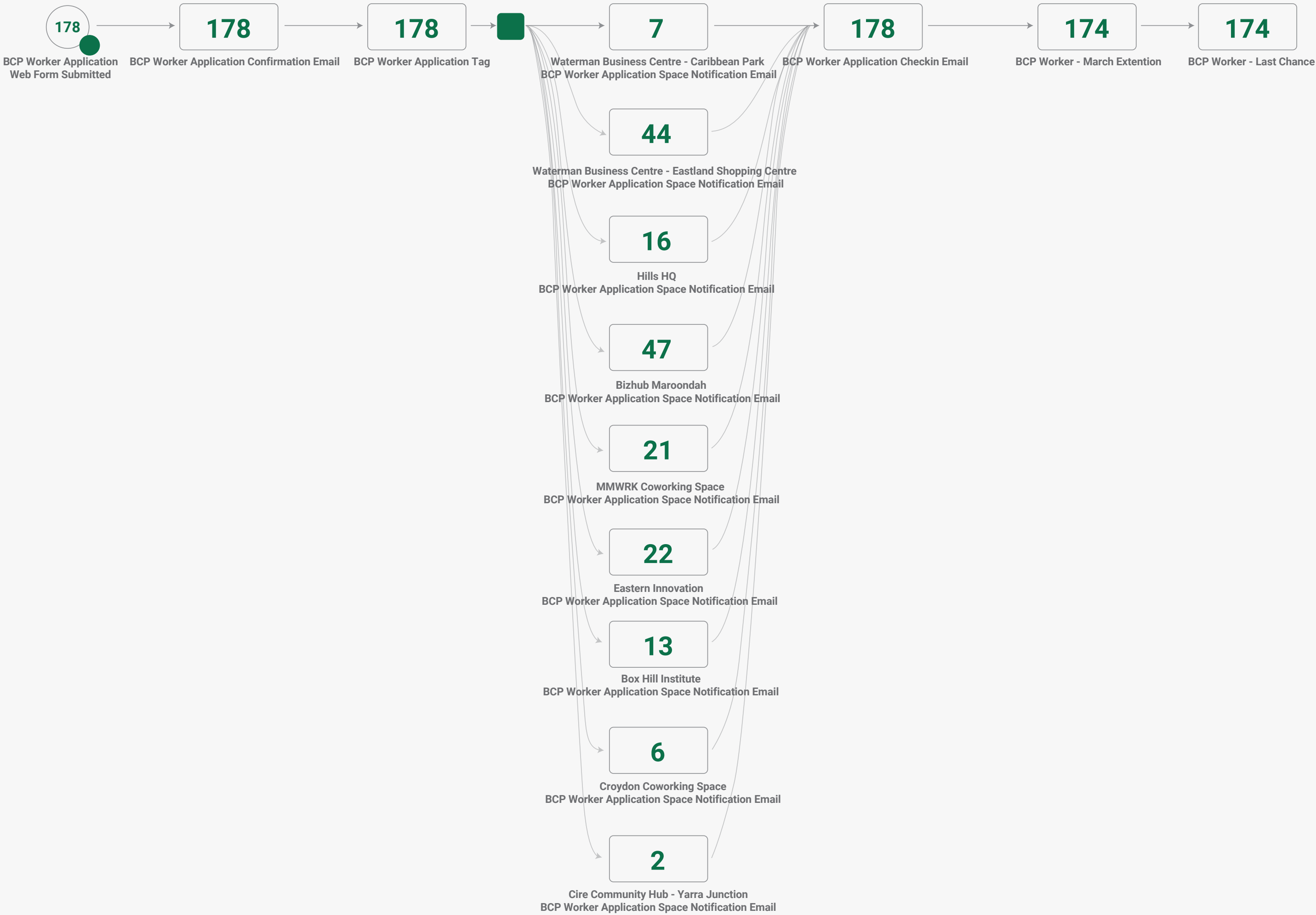| Stage	Detail	Approach	Outcome
Stage 7 Payment of Vouchers	Payment of vouchers upon receipt of evidence of redemption Payments to Councils	Financial	78 vouchers were claimed by workers 5 councils applied for funding Further, one chose not to directly receive funding and instead appointed a coworking consultant specialising in retail to support on the ground research for a business case.
Stage 8 Reporting	Collation of survey results Preparation of draft report Delivery of draft report Program financial reporting	Reporting	38 surveys were collected

APPENDIX 4 MARKETING REPORT

Website Views

	Page Views	Unique Page Views	Time on Page
Boosting Coworking Program	1758	1532	2:04 65% Bounce Rate
Boosting Coworking Program Voucher Application	504	432	2:02
Boosting Coworking Program Worker Application Thanks	167	158	1:09
Boosting Coworking Program - Contact details for participating workspaces	7	5	2:06
TOTAL	**2436**	**2127**	**N/A**

Voucher Program outcomes

	Registered	Claimed	% claimed
Waterman - Eastland	47	22	47%
Waterman - Caribbean Park	7	0	0%
HMWRK	22	0	0%
Box Hill Institute	12	3	25%
Hills HQ	16	9	56%
Eastern Innovation	20	14	70%
Cire - Yarra Junction	2	0	0%
Croydon Coworking Space	4	0	0%
BizHub	46	30	65%
TOTAL	**176**	**78**	**44%**

Email engagement for the voucher program

```
178
BCP Worker Application
Web Form Submitted
```

```
178
BCP Worker Application Confirmation Email
```

```
178
BCP Worker Application Tag
```

```
7
Waterman Business Centre - Caribbean Park
BCP Worker Application Space Notification Email
```

```
44
Waterman Business Centre - Eastland Shopping Centre
BCP Worker Application Space Notification Email
```

```
16
Hills HQ
BCP Worker Application Space Notification Email
```

```
47
Bizhub Maroondah
BCP Worker Application Space Notification Email
```

```
21
MMWRK Coworking Space
BCP Worker Application Space Notification Email
```

```
22
Eastern Innovation
BCP Worker Application Space Notification Email
```

```
13
Box Hill Institute
BCP Worker Application Space Notification Email
```

```
6
Croydon Coworking Space
BCP Worker Application Space Notification Email
```

```
2
Cire Community Hub - Yarra Junction
BCP Worker Application Space Notification Email
```

```
178
BCP Worker Application Checkin Email
```

```
174
BCP Worker - March Extention
```

```
174
BCP Worker - Last Chance
```
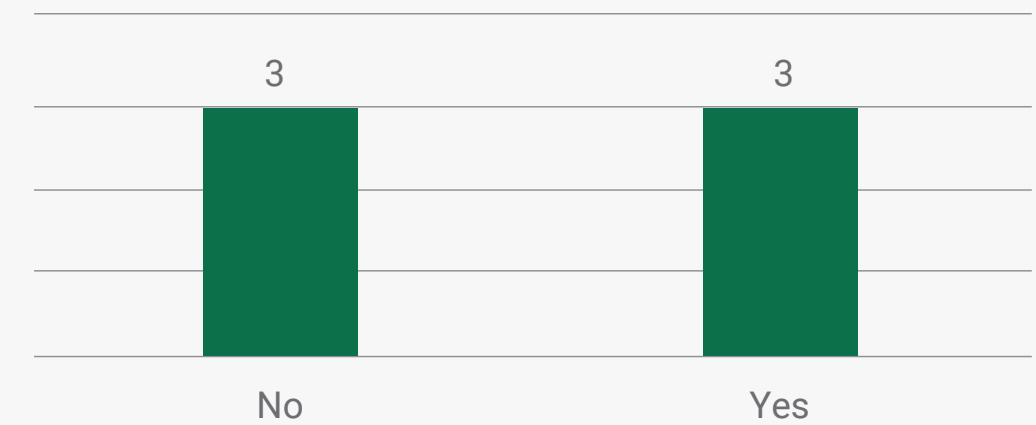
APPENDIX 5
PRE-WORKSHOP
COUNCIL SURVEY

Each Council attending the pop-up coworking workshop were asked to complete a survey.

Questions:

1. Has your Council investigated the set-up of a pop-up coworking venue?

2. Do you currently have a venue identified to use for a pop-up?

3. Do you have a target market identified? eg. creatives, startups or workers

4. Are you aware of any coworking, flexible office spaces in your Council area?
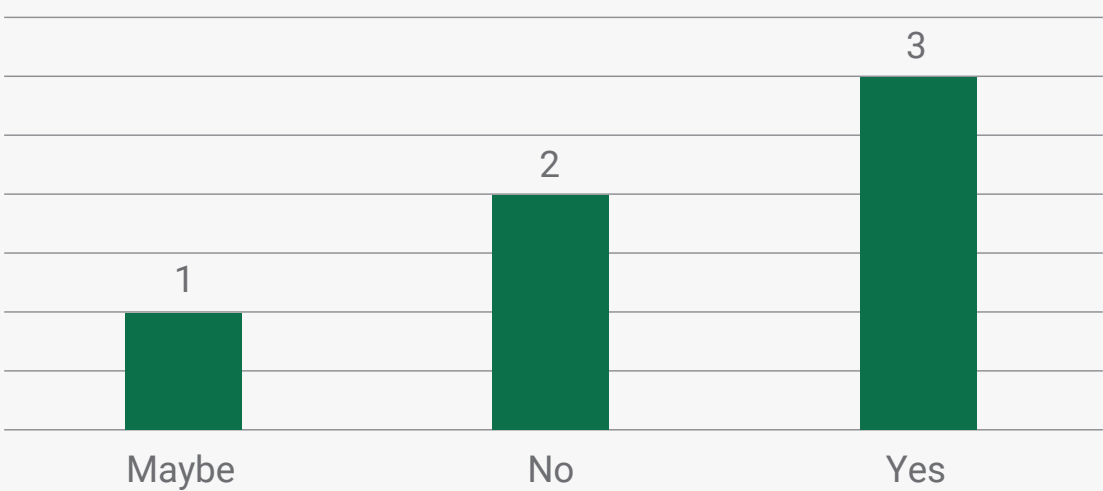
Responses

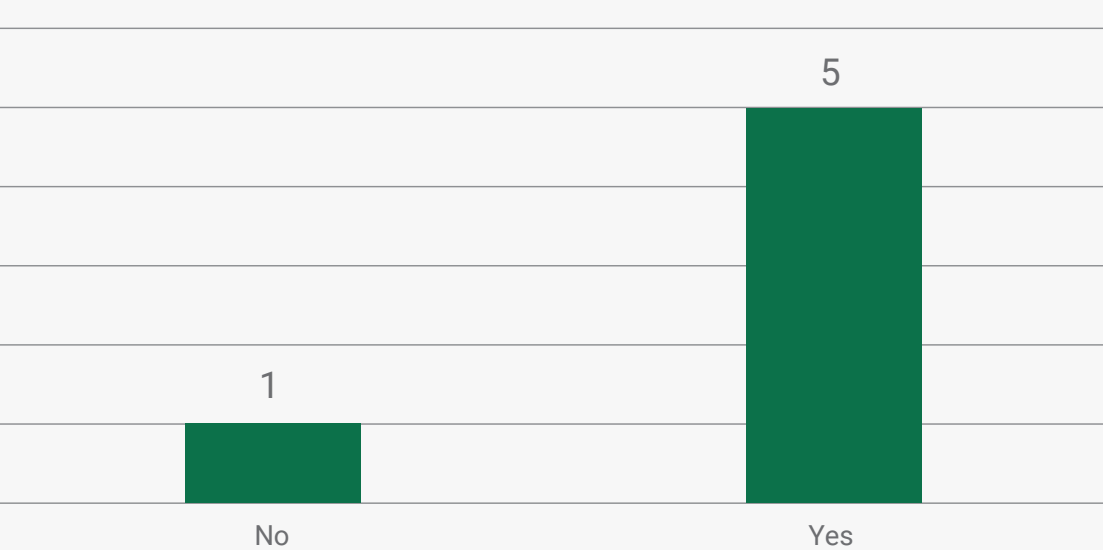Has your council investigated the set-up of a pop up coworking venue?

No	Yes
3	3

Do you currently have a venue identified to use for a pop up?

Maybe	No	Yes
1	2	3

Do you have a target market indentified? eg. creatives, startups of workers
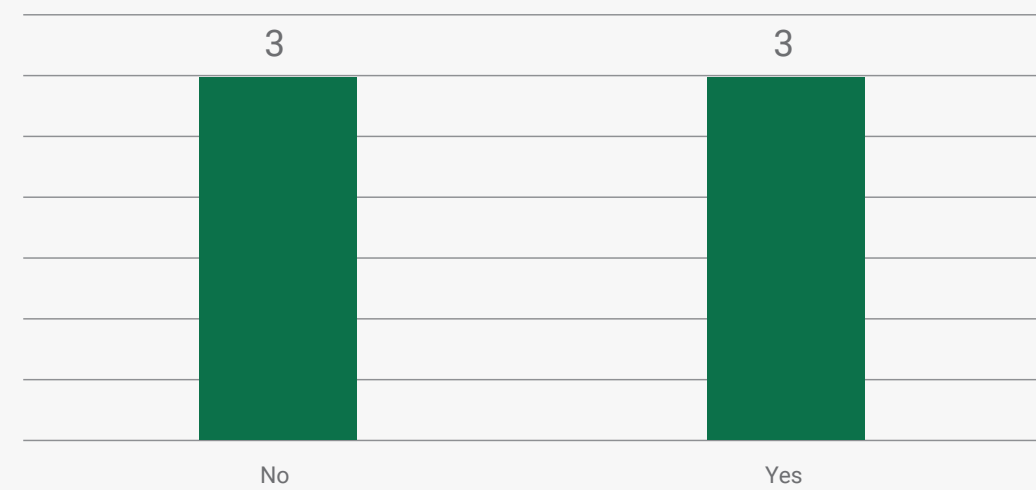
No	Yes
3	3

Are you aware of any coworking, flexing office spaces in your Council are?

No	Yes
1	5

APPENDIX 6 PRE-WORKSHOP RESEARCH RESULTS

The Boosting Coworking Program was an Eastern Metropolitan Partnership, Development Funds Program and was delivered by Flexible Workspace Australia Ltd.

The Program was commenced by holding a workshop, to gain participation from local councils who were identified as key strategic delivery partners of the Program.

To prepare for the workshop, Flexible Workspace Australia asked six current coworking leaders a series of questions to uncover the potential for local governments to deliver and lead pop-up coworking. Those leaders came from a mix of commercial coworking operations, not-for profit coworking operations and Council coworking operations. It is important to note that the survey respondents were not referring to any particular Councils, but to councils as a collective, across Australia.

Overwhelmingly, the sentiment was that local government organisations have a role to play in delivering pop-up coworking for their niched target sectors. However, at that time (July 2021) Councils were not well resourced with the people or the funds to deliver spaces for extended periods of time. Exceptions to this rule were evident in some LGAs such as the City of Maroondah who successfully run their coworking space, Biz Hub at Realm in Ringwood and the City of Hume who successfully run Start North in Broadmeadows.

Responses to the following questions by the private providers were analysed and worked into the content of the Pop-up

Coworking workshop:

1. What do you think is the state of market regarding coworking by Councils?

2. What (target) markets do you think Councils can excel in?

3. What ideal venues do you Councils could use for pop-up coworking?

4. What do you think Councils wish they'd known (about coworking)?

5. What hard infrastructure do pop-up coworking spaces need?

6. What soft infrastructure do pop-up coworking spaces need?

7. What creative collaborations have you seen between Councils and commercial operators?

Below are the detailed responses and summary points used to inform the Pop-up Coworking Workshop delivered in August 2021. Beneath each detailed list of answers is a collated summary. Anonymised answers to each question are detailed below have also been represented in a word cloud.

Note that the answers below represent the opinions of the experts interviewed.

1. What do you think is the state of market regarding coworking by Councils?

» Right now, many Councils are uncertain. No-one knows the market.

» Might be a lack of confidence that the big players own the results.

» Case of wait and see.

» They have an interest and know more than they did before.

» Know they can use if for economic development.

» Little understanding of where to take it after Covid.

» Supported coworking as a concept but leadership can be risk adverse due to not wanting to own coworking or be the resource of coworking.

» Facilitating and transferring skills sets has been effective.

» Direct support would be welcome – to get home office people to use coworking.

» Awareness has grown about coworking locations springing up and the variety of coworking.

» Natural and organic to date.

» Not a lot of clarity of the role that a council would have.

» A growing awareness of working locally and not travelling – for council employees too.

» Business teams in libraries, but not implemented as a strategy. Being available to the community.

» Aware of coworking as an option for their own assets.

» How to optimise their assets.

» A lack of cohesive thinking around the economic development strategy for their area and their community and how they join up, strategically.

» Councils have traditionally set up business incubators. A lot fail as they may partner with organisations that may not have the right resources, networks or expertise.

» Outsourcing with the people who might not be best at incubators / accelerators can be a failing.

» Flex and coworking has a bit to do to gain credibility.

» Down to the individuals themselves.

» Coworking has finally hitting "Ecodev" radar. It's trendy but some don't really understand what it is.

» Need education on benefits and reasons for it and how to implement it.

» Remodelled libraries have extensions but don't understand staffing, financial models or how to run a coworking space.

» May have been broached by a Councillor.

» See coworking as an essential part of economic infrastructure, makes them look contemporary.

» Sometimes wheeled out for business commerce or chamber events for supporting small business in the area.

» Destination marketing for people moving into area. Relieved of having to provide that support.

» A confused relationship.

» Competitive nature with what is already there. This can cut the market. Often not a commercial venture (with their funding) with cheap memberships that impacts the market.

» It's all very recent, it hasn't been long.

» The danger of it being another cycle until the next big thing. Then they move on, they quietly kill it.

» It's very related to the humans that are in the departments.

» People need to be "in it" and invested in the industry or community.

» Sometimes broken.

Summary from question 1:

a. Councils are aware of private operators, know more about coworking services and benefits thereof but are predominately waiting to see if Councils can have a leading role in the sector.

b. Covid has led to a distinct awareness about staff working from home, or more locally based office locations such as coworking to reduce travel time and large numbers of staff congregating together.

c. Some Councils have been confident with Business Incubators and can see extrapolated benefits to coworking; others with failed Business Incubators are more risk adverse to enter into coworking arrangements.

d. Councils are seen to have dual roles that conflict between providing services to rate payers and supporting local businesses. They need clear strategic goals and internal ownership of them needs to be well placed to support a genuine coworking space hosted by Council and that those goals must be clearly communicated to the identified target audience of that Local Government Area.

2. What (target) markets do you think Councils can excel in?

» They should know their community well.

» One size does not fit well.

» Can't be copied.

» It doesn't need to be everywhere if it doesn't need to be anywhere.

» Pop-up coworking has been done and has created an outcome and it had a purpose. One to two weeks.

» If you don't explain the WHY then the execution will be poor. Start with Why.

» Why does our community need it? If it is placemaking, it's about attraction of others. If it's about our community having better access to services, then low-cost access might work.

» Ask why the area is inactive in the first place? Forcing something in doesn't work.

» Stem pop-ups.

» Was sold as developing startups, where they start their business and grow into a larger business and stay in the region.

» Jobs growth is critical.

» Circular economy as a niche.

» Many Councils are not so good at attracting startups and are best to target existing micro businesses (1-9) people. Accounting, marketing, finance etc.

» Creating jobs and lowering unemployment.

» Entrepreneurial councils (and not all are) aspire to niche (arts or maker space). Good at building things but not necessarily running things. If they are running it, it needs to be broad and general. They do better when people come from the outside with drive and expertise.

» Many councils focus on med businesses, small businesses often fall through the cracks. Coworking spaces have that touchpoint .

» Two niches where councils can assist where a commercial operator might not want to – creative operators (small) and regular commercial doesn't suit that market (paying fees and running businesses.

» Small young startups, young people starting small local businesses, self-employed.

» If they are just having sub sectors, perhaps it would become a networking event. It becomes an event after an event.

» Hard pushed to say that there is any particular group.

» Councils at two ends of the spectrum – one end is research and stats, but cannot translate into action, and at the other end, have tried lots of different things, but not enough strategy to tie it together.

» The priority of market can often be related to individual's attention.

» Legacy or history can determine focus areas (ie Fitzroy arts and cultural).

» Asking councils to define their innate assets within the community and if it points to that market, then there is an opportunity for them to excel.

» Skill set of Economic Development is to be out talking to their community, not sit behind a desk. To move around to share what is happening from another space to the next.

» Boots on the ground would be beneficial. More opportunities to PR and promote their services.

» Trends that the business team focuses on such as circular economy (CE) or home-based business with sharing of tools.

» Circular Economy could have environment team and other speakers to share as well as raising awareness. This niche could be a good opportunity for a council.

» It will need to be promoted. Niching in maker space / creative.

» Niching depends on the flavour of the local area.

» Councils and State Govt. have an interest in creative.

» Educational and Stem space are becoming more evident.

» Digital literacy.

Summary from question 2:

a. Councils should know their local area well and recognise that not one size fits all, thus they can be well placed to move on delivering coworking services in response to their identified local need/s.

b. It was thought that Councils would do well to support very small businesses via coworking services, which often fall between the cracks instead of focusing on medium size businesses which already get a reasonable amount of support from various stakeholders.

c. A small business focus could include small home-based business, who are well placed to benefit from shared access to resources a coworking space could provide. For example, young business owners, new businesses, sole traders etc that are likely to (want to) remain as home-based.

d. Niche areas to focus on were suggested: education; STEM; digital. It was noted promotion by Council would be key – and that it is not a series of events being promoted, but rather a genuine coworking service.

3. What ideal venues do you think councils could use for pop-up coworking?

» Whatever venues they have but need to be readily acceptable to businesses.

» Vacant shops for short term use .

» An old courthouse.

» Local manufacturers they are not fully utilising.

» It can't look like a meeting room in a council building but needs to be accessible and recognised that council has reached outside council that they feel comfortable to come to.

» If it is a well-known and respected company, it's got credibility with other businesses.

» Yacht club for example, café or club attached to this space. 200-300 sqm.

» Any place that they are seeking to create a community hub (depending on purpose).

» Is size important?

» Council run assets.

» Town halls, old secondary schools, Council offices lend themselves to coworking.

» Often councils don't know what assets they have.

» Suggesting an audit on their assets (or vacancy in other spaces / other landlords who might like to collaborate) to see what might be used as office space or makerspace.

» Event spaces, community halls, regional galleries, libraries.

» Expansion is difficult.

» Councils are not excited to do capex on buildings they don't own.

» Money needs to be spent on things that they don't own.

» They prefer to use existing buildings that could be repurposed.

» In one of their floors in a main building.

» Pop-ups – they might prefer to outsource it and fund it. They don't have the staffing to support it.

» Depends on the kinds of people you want to engage with. Business won't be forced into just any space.

» It will depend on the why.

» Areas of barrier, the places need to tailor (the programs, what is the activation).

» If there is a great operator, bring them in.

Summary from question 3:

a. Suggestions for venues centred around Council owned assets include event spaces, libraries, community halls, regional galleries etc.

b. Other suggestions focused on other established community hubs, so a known venue in a location ie town halls, old secondary schools, vacant commercial premises (shop fronts).

c. The venue needs to be accessible in the broader sense: physical and a recognised hub for the community now / or somewhere they want to become a community hub.

d. The venue needs to be 'attractive' to the targeted audience of the coworking space.

e. Some suggestions were made about Councils bringing in a great external operator if they can do that.

4. What do you think councils wish they'd known (about coworking)?

» Slowly pivoting from an incubator to a helping to grow micro businesses.

» Coworking is not a part of the real estate business. Differentiators need to be found (master classes etc). Skills growth helps them grow.

» Someone who is entrepreneurial needs to run it

» Policies get in the way.

» CEOs need to know it loses money (coworking as a single product), other revenue sources (that's why flex is important).

» Consultants who write reports need to have run coworking spaces.

» Businesses still need space to grow into. They need somewhere to grow to. They need to de-risk their next step.

» How hard it is to make coworking space work.

» Making things cool dynamic and authentic is the secret to coworking spaces work. It's not an internet café of 2021.

» The nature of the community is what makes it special.

» Quality of design is important (cheap and "council" is not attractive).

» Curious to see what a pop-up coworking space would look like

» Coworking was seen by councils as a solution to a problem that they had clearly defined. For example, overlay that in an incubator environment and create an exciting environment in a business hub – there is an enormous amount to be done to make that successful – a whole ecosystem needs to support that

» Attract people with money

» Facilitators (skilled)

» People who can help community

» Partners

» Relationships

» Proper coordination – people pointing in the right direction

» Flexible coworking is definitely a deliberate and coordinated ecosystem to make it work successfully

» Coworking is one product – Their role is to hold the space for special interactions to take place, to allow organisations to get onto a continuum and help them to continue on the continuum.

» Co-location / flex / coworking is about communities and community work and when people feel that they belong and are recognised.

» Need to know how much work is involved.

» It is not simple and resources can grow.

» Minimum levels of investment to get community traction.

» Benefits are hard to track and measure.

» Having clear objectives.

» Helping businesses recover from Covid.

» Originally discussions were around the role of helping the setup and the best model for an effective coworking (community focussed and supportive of business development), but there is not a general broad understanding of Ecodev teams or teams of what their role is.

» How to Support Local.

» Any feedback on how you define coworking and the essence of getting the best out of it, including structure and management which is unknown to council employees.

Summary from question 4:

a. Needs to be run by someone who is entrepreneurial. Just running a coworking space will not cover all costs, it needs to have other income streams associated with the space.

b. Businesses need physical space to grow into their next step. There can be a logical link between offering an incubator program; then a coworking space; and then some permanent space within the same premises.

c. The built environment of the facilities and the community created by the operator is key to a successful coworking space – it is an entire ecosystem when successful.

d. The services and space can be cool, dynamic and authentic but it works best when the space is matched to the niche or target audience the coworking space is established for.

e. Coworking is one product. Council's role is to hold the space for special interactions to take place, to allow organisations to get onto a continuum and help them to continue on the continuum. Coworking spaces are a lot of work and take time to build up, they need good co-ordination and the right staff operating the space to build up the community.

f. Benefits of a coworking space are hard to track and measure so there needs to be clear objectives in establishing and then alignment accordingly in delivery. This will make it easier to measure success

5. What hard infrastructure do pop up coworking spaces need?

- » WiFi / internet.
- » The fit out is not as important, if the spaces are comfortable and workable.
- » Councils may have existing furniture that can fit in
- » Friendly, warm, inviting.
- » Food is important. Either close to food places or able to bring it in.
- » Pop up desks.
- » Office infrastructure (chairs, desks / products for presentations and workshops.)
- » WiFi
- » Food and coffee.
- » Meeting booths for coaching and mentoring.
- » Minimum $10,000 for a few weeks.
- » Access to transport and links for travel. Ten-minute walking link is essential.
- » Parking can be an issue.
- » Tenants may or may not have their own transport.
- » Internet and WiFi.
- » Aesthetics appear as important on surveys, and important. Ignore it at peril
- » Image has to resonate with the individuals engaged.

- » Pop up may not need to be as perfect.
- » Good nbn connection.
- » 24 hour access (libraries have issues here).
- » Security systems.
- » Studio or desk space.
- » Meeting room spaces.
- » Lounge.
- » Social areas.
- » Exhibition space.
- » Tea and coffee, but not necessarily food.
- » Near a good coffee shop.
- » All day parking or proximity to transport.
- » Off a library, sections of desks.
- » Kids studying is not a good fit for a professional environment.
- » A large meeting room.
- » High speed internet (not public internet with filters). 100% WiFi is ok. Not shared with any other parts of council.
- » Coffee tea, restroom, quiet spaces, somewhere to meet clients.

- » Someone to greet clients.
- » Parking is critical.
- » Desks
- » WiFi.
- » The cleaner the space the better. It's hard to retro fit a rigid space.
- » It's like an exhibition space – moveable and flexible.
- » Meeting room and events space.
- » What does the community need?
- » It doesn't have to be perfect. You don't want it to look too manufactured. Local to the area is important.

Summary from question 5:

a. Hard infrastructure suggested featured internet and WiFi access, desks, meeting rooms, lounge, social areas, 24-hour security access, exhibition space, parking and somewhere to meet clients.

b. Soft infrastructure (also answered in this question) and/or external infrastructure suggestions include tea and coffee (not necessarily food), all day offsite parking, access to public transport, near a good coffee shop, free of kids, located with or near a library and if not close to cafes etc. then able to bring food in. It also needs to be a clean space.

c. And it was noted that you needed to provide what the community needs.

6. What soft infrastructure do pop-up coworking spaces need?

» Use the council network to understand the reality of the business – get locals to engage.

» Cater from local businesses.

» Connect with local community.

» Don't spend the budget on a keynote speaker, get the local community together first.

» Community Managers are essential.

» A focus on customer service – it is selling and negotiation.

» Open to change.

» Policies and procedures that can change.

» Translation services / support for ESL.

» Person onsite at all times.

» Good signage.

» Money spent on marketing and comms. Note that many councils cannot have a full range of social media.

» Proactive comms not reactive.

» Entrepreneurial attitudes.

» Leisure centre memberships have a similar attitude.

» Concierge service – you must make them feel welcome and introduce them to each other.

» Council can do this, but an engaging community development concierge host is essential.

» Marketing and comms to access target markets.

» A group or digital network to connect the people that are using it (as a legacy as a pop-up moves on).

» As they have a temporary / transient nature, there needs to be some coordination on behalf of the tenant community. Not always a concierge, but a point of contact to make it easy.

» Something that is "easy to work in and easy to work with". Pop-ups need to be easy so that people can see it, understand it and get on board quickly.

» Facilitators.

» Content.

» Someone who is the community person to show people what is going on / guide people.

» Creativity of being able to be fluid and enable brainstorming.

» Walls to write on / beanbags to make people feel that they are stepping out of the office.

» A person to be the lynchpin to make people feel welcome. Someone too that can bring other people in too.

» Provide something online to share it out – so that those that haven't stepped in, can see. This could be Linkedin / videos etc.

Summary from question 6:

a. Focus on community by engaging staff with a community development skillset.

b. Have a customer service focus or create a concierge service. It's important to make the community feel welcome and as they have a transient nature, it helps provide continuity and enable contacts between users and into other services.

c. Have the creativity to be able to be fluid and enable brainstorming. An example of this is walls to write on or spaces to make people feel that they are stepping out of the office and relax.

d. Ensure there is a person to be the lynchpin to make people feel welcome. Someone too that can bring other people in. This suggestion reinforces the concept of engaging staff working to develop a community.

e. Provide something online to share it out so that those that haven't stepped in, can see. This could be Linkedin / videos etc.

7. What creative collaborations have you seen between councils and commercial operators?

» Visiting other spaces and contributing by being there (and telling the group what council does).

» Things that to include the local community, such as an outdoor cinema. Council can be a conduit to the community. Council can be a direct link to those spaces.

» Small collaborations (a spot in the e-news, marketing to a wider audience). Covid has opened new doors to allow the teams to offer more outreach.

» Experienced where the business incubator was taken over. Ecodev wanted help creating a catalyst for the district (iedesign) to create a momentum behind the district to encourage clusters of design and activity. Enhancing what was there and engaging with a local education institution (and others) and relevant government agencies to design hubs/ places/spaces and curate and create an environment that supports innovation through infrastructure to modernise and provide facilities.

» Provision of green or open space for the general community to come through as well.

» A network of assets and places and spaces to help solve current and future problems.

» Working with all levels of government to see if they can support innovation cycles and avoid the problems in the pathway (ie commercialisation points).

» Alignment of goals is essential – some common ground between councils and commercial operators, offering councils legitimacy in their service provision and their timely response to current problems and opportunities.

» Asset optimisation, how they can partner and outsource what they are not resourced to do, limited revenue growth opportunities and how to optimise that, how they engage civic or economic communities and how to collaborate with them (coworking is great for that) and Councils have their own workplaces that need optimisation – their own workforce is looking for the same things as corporate

» FWA (Flexible Workspace Australia) is seen by councils as something to support that is safe for councils without having to single out commercial operators.

» Council to put on an event for them or spaces putting on an event for Council.

» Councils funding coworking days, instead of trying to do it themselves.

» Run business growth workshops from coworking spaces.

» Consulting with commercial operators when example opening coworking spaces (seeking input of operators).

» Council sponsoring memberships through scholarships – a great partnership.

» If the council asked them to collaborate on the pop-up space, would want to make sure the brand was of the standard, that the cohort experienced enough altruism to make it worthwhile and that the cohort wouldn't be a customer of the coworking space later. (ie not competing with the existing space.)

» The opportunity may have to deliver a commercial benefit to the commercial operator.

» If the council had the shared customer (and the regional ones generally don't) (ie a larger city council) then a collaboration might be worthwhile.

» Seek the coworking space that suits the style of pop-up.

» Grants for programs (with state government program events).

» Many council departments are siloed so a commercial space may need to approach each department (ie Strategic planning, libraries, community strengthening) individually to access their budget.

» Collaborators will get in place when there is a purpose.

» Councils hire venues every day – why not coworking spaces?

» Don't always ask councils to do you favours.

» Commercial operators can help you to do the job easier. Then the relationships become free-er. Get into the spaces and meet the companies and benefit from the colocation. Hold meetings there. It brings the stories.

» Try to find the people that don't just do the obvious (ie a growing your business workshop compared to a unique connection to bring you closer to your community). Library teams and lifelong learning for example. Creative industry.

Summary from question 7:

a. Lots of great suggestions were made, many relating to linking the coworking space to the community, i.e. cinema events in a park; links to library resources and staff; provision of green or open space; have people that make genuine connections.

b. Other suggestions were made around offering associated opportunities at the coworking space include business focused workshops, pop ups in the space, council sponsoring days in the space, a spot in the e-news, opportunities for cross marketing/promotions, working with all levels of government to support innovation and links into other services/supports. These things offer bring the chance to break down any silos of a Council and have the different departments connected in how they engage with their customer base within a shared coworking space

APPENDIX 7 DATA ANALYSIS REPORT - BOOSTING COWORKING SURVEY RESULTS

This Report details and summarises the surveys completed by workers who had tried coworking as a result of stream two of the Boosting Coworking Program – Vouchers for Workers to try coworking.

General:

» The surveys sent out asked a couple of different questions, seeking more info – they have not been included in the results (ie the secondary question about choosing a particular venue)

» Only 38 responses - however one person used two different coworking spaces and completed the survey with slightly different answers

» Some fields were not mandatory, with no answer provided

» Qualitative data is based on the one open ended question

» Very little extra feedback provided

Surveys were returned by 38 participants from the following coworking venues:

» BH – 5 returns

» HHQ – 7 returns

» BH2 – 10 returns

» W – 14 returns

» EIBC – 3 returns

Why did you decided to try coworking?

This was a free form question, so lots of answers. There were some themes in the answers, which have been counted and reported against a statement that reflects each theme.

» Tired from working from home (during Covid) / wanted to get out of home office and wanted an office space option – 7 responses

» Needed somewhere away from the home office and/ or somewhere to focus on tasks/wanting a productive, inspiring space – 7 responses

» Try before you try / voucher offer – 2 responses

» Good way to meet / meet clients (in formal setting) – 4 responses

» Wanted to assess if it would be useful / part of a Company trial – 3 responses

» Networking opportunities – 3 responses

» Meet team-mates (I haven't met before due to Covid) – 2 responses

» Used to have a space in the city – 1 response

» Because we gave up the office (after paying rent during pandemic) – 1 response

» Looked at coworking before but mostly inner city – 1 response

» Been wanting to try for a while / try before Covid – 1 response

» Getting started with my business – 1 response

» Had a friend who does it – 1 response

We had closed our office during Covid and I wanted to see if coworking would work for us – 1 response

What services did you use while coworking?

Not everyone answered this free form question, though it was mostly use of desks (11) and use of meeting rooms (7); and (3) wanted a casual membership option.

How likely are you to co-work again after this experience?

● No response

● Very unlikely

● Unlikely

● Maybe

● Likely

● Very likely

● Yes but elsewhere
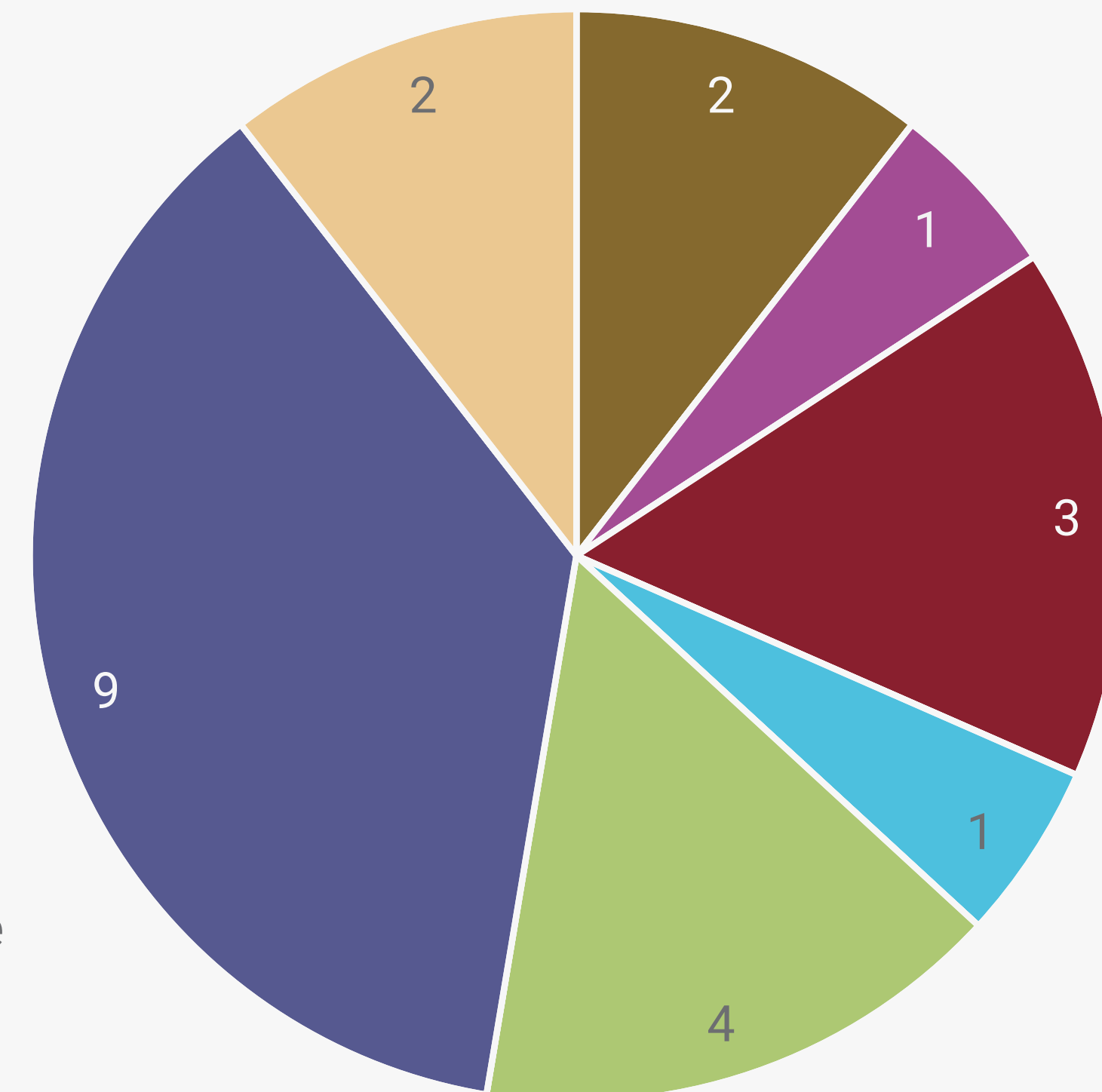
Reasons for why they would/wouldn't co-work again varied; the majority were overall positive about their experience.

Comments included:

» "Very clean and professional facilities and perfect for focused 'deep work' while also having some ambience and social interaction"

» "Meeting room was nice and we were able to get lots done"

» "It was quite and pleasant and nice to be somewhere different"

» "Everyone was nice and accommodating and I found it to be beneficial"

» Nice people and helped me focus

» "Maybe a good solution on occasions"

» "Very convenient – removes normal office distractions"

» "I found I was much more productive and focused in the environment"

» "Nice people, quite, and a good change of scenery"

» "Will definitely use again. We find the service and staff excellent at the space. They are very accommodating and very easy to work with. Couldn't recommend this facility highly enough."

The answers also provided some insight to what people valued and/or considered when using a coworking space.

Comments included:

» "I enjoyed it and will just need to work out cost when it works"

» "I will reconsider business accommodation options after the imminent Holiday break"

» "It is a lovely space with lovely people and everything works! It is simple to book too"

» "Great facilities and friendly staff"

» "Good location, good facility and supportive team"

» "Very convenient – removes normal office distractions"

» "The casual coworking room was too small to take calls"

» "Was great to connect with work-mates in real life again"

» "The lack of storage/lockers for the pop-up facility reduce the appeal. It is significantly less convenient if I'm required to take all equipment et cetera with me when going for a coffee or meal break"

» Enjoyed experience. Welcoming. Productive.

How much did the $100 voucher influence your decision to cowork?

- ● Not at all
- ● Slightly
- ● Somewhat
- ● Definitely
- ● Very definitely
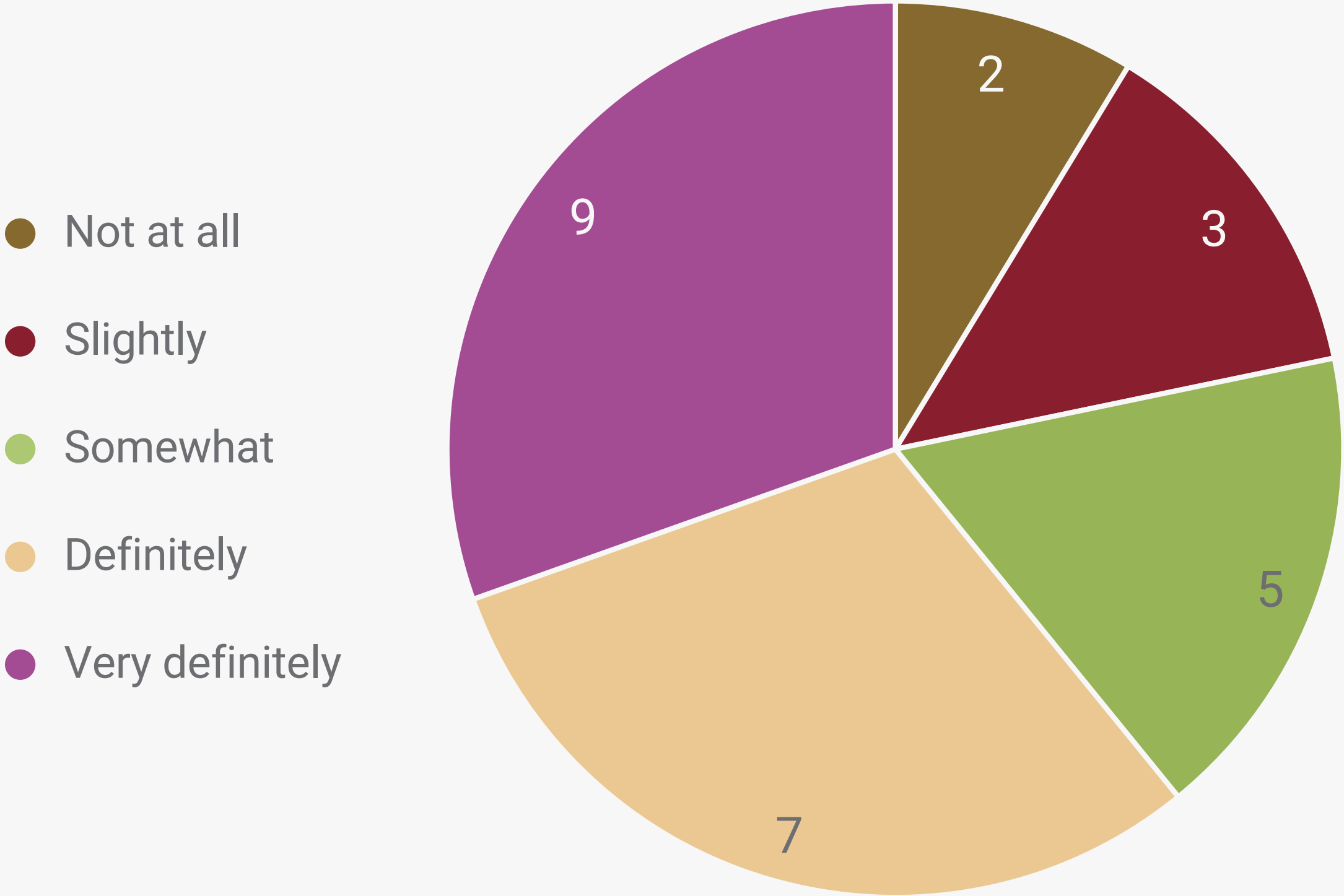
Two people provided additional feedback, regarding why they choose coworking:

» "Nice to have [the voucher] – it probably spurred me into action, but I was planning to do this at some point anyway"

» Response provide "For (coworking space): Friendly staff, access to food courts and retail shops, access to public transport (train and bus). Against (coworking space used) Car Parking for visitors when I want to run training session"

» "Voucher did not influence us at all. The service speaks for itself and does not require an incentive. However having said that, we did appreciate this offer".

Further analysis of the participants, demonstrates that:

» over two thirds of the participants who completed the survey, had not tried coworking before, 26 out of the 39 respondents

» Of those 25 participants, 14 were women, 7 were men and for 3 their gender is unknown.

» Of the 13 who had tried coworking before close to two thirds were men, which reinforces the slight trend to more women trying coworking for the first time.

By using assumptions around gendered names, there was a slight trend towards more women using the co working spaces then men.

- Female
- Male
- Unknown
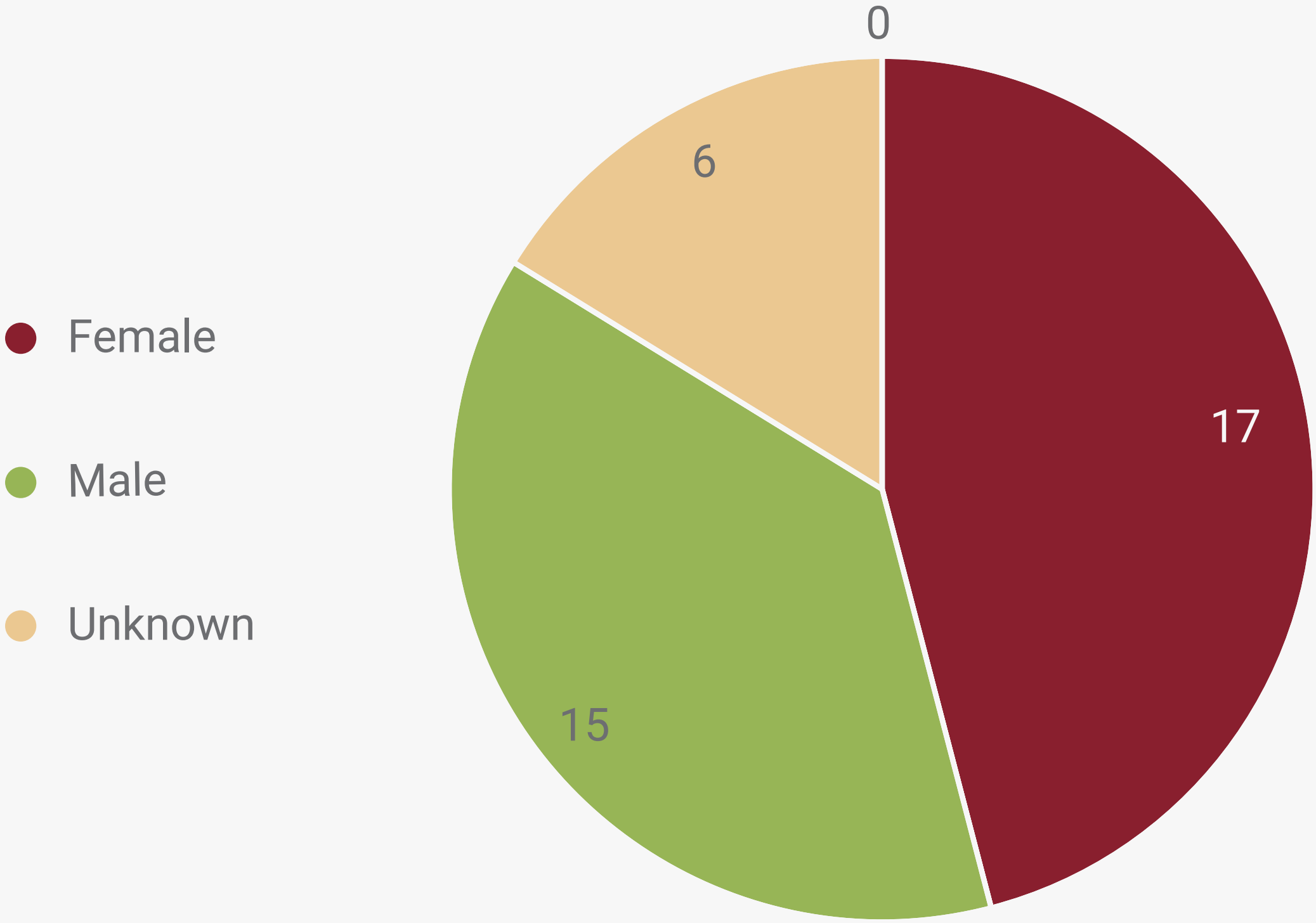
APPENDIX 8 POP-UP COWORKING IN RETAIL FACT SHEET

Tips for local governments considering implementation of short-term or temporary flexible workspaces to support local communities. Produced for City of Knox through the Eastern Metropolitan Partnership by Bioom June 2022. https://www.bioom.com.au/

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THANK YOU