HUNTER RESEARCH FOUNDATION CENTRE

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE AUSTRALIA

CITY OF NEWCASTLE

Evaluation of the COVID-19 Economic and Social Resilience Package – Phase Two Final Report

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the global community in unprecedented and unpredictable ways. The ensuing social and economic impacts have amounted to the single largest crisis since WWII faced by the City of Newcastle at a local level.

The Hunter Research Foundation Centre (HRFC) was commissioned to evaluate the City of Newcastle's COVID-19 Economic and Social Resilience Package and the formation of a City of Taskforce. The package, worth $5.5 million, consists of 10 programs scheduled for roll-out over three phases between April 2020 and June 2021. The programs included a raft of financial relief, business and community supports – including interest free payment plans for rates, rent reductions on council-owned buildings, free online training packages, and community grants programs to support our vulnerable and emerging at-risk community members.

The Resilience Package aims to ameliorate the impacts of COVID pandemic for the Newcastle LGA through:

- Direct actions to support City of Newcastle community wellbeing;
- Timely responses that address cash-flow for small business;
- Innovative programs that provide long-term strategic benefits for the city;
- Collaboration with partners and contribution to existing initiatives; and
- Financial responsibility for the long-term sustainability of the organisation.

Nine of these programs are being evaluated by the HRFC. The methodology for the evaluation can be found at Table 2. This report is based on the following evaluation activities:

- Analysis of program data;
- Interviews with Program Managers of the Grants, E-Library / Studiosity / Lynda, Lean-In Newy App and Online Training Program;
- Interview with the Resilience Package Program Manager;
- Interviews with two Rapid Response grant recipients;
- Interviews with four Boost Our City grant recipients;
- Analysis of an online survey with E-Library subscribers;
- An interview with Financial Hardship Program Manager; and
- Three interviews with the RTOs that received funding under the Online Training program.

Evaluation Findings

The evaluation has found that the **speed** at which the City of Newcastle acted to develop the Package has clearly been an asset. The design of the package was largely completed and presented to the Council Executive Team on the 18th March 2020, almost two weeks before the state went into lockdown. Early planning and quick mobilisation meant that programs could be approved and implemented and that citizens potentially impacted by the virus could be assisted promptly.

Another major strength of the program is that it is **well-rounded**, particularly with regard to careful consideration and identification of segments most likely affected by COVID-19 – namely vulnerable populations, the unemployed and small business. A recent community survey

conducted by CN indicates that support for the package is high, with almost two-thirds (70%) in agreement that the package will assist the city to deal with the impacts of COVID-19.

The Resilience Package also represents a **new way of working** for Council. Firstly, it has been the single largest crisis since WWII faced by the City at a local level, which is also true of the majority of local governments across the globe. In addition, the response package was also a first as it involved the delivery across a breadth of program areas (small business, residents, vulnerable communities). Finally, the pandemic and the development of the Resilience Package required CN staff with diverse skill sets across disciplines to work together toward a shared goal under extreme time constraints while facing many unknowns.

Analysis of program data has indicated the following outputs and outcomes from the Resilience Package:
- At the height of the **Financial Hardship Program** (10th July 2020) 761 payment plans at a value of $1.25M were in place for both businesses and residents.
- The **Rent Relief Program** provided $732,000 in rent reductions over a six month period for 60 local businesses and community organsations. The aim of the program is to address cash-flow for small business and community organisations.
- The **E-Library** has been expanded to provide Library members with additional entertainment, news and study opportunities at a cost of $100,000. Early feedback collected by CN indicated that it has been a source of entertainment and has increased the wellbeing of those experiencing isolation in recent months. An online survey conducted with n=567 E-Library subscribers has indicated that 46% had used the E-Library more frequently during lockdown mostly to download e-books and audio books and 82% felt that they would continue to use the E-Library in the future. Satisfaction levels with the E-Library were high with 87% either very satisfied or satisfied. Survey results also confirm that for three-quarters of respondents increased usage has been sustained, supporting that long term value add provided by the program for the community. Positively, three-quarters of the sample felt that access to the E-Library benefited them or their family either during or after lockdown.
- E-Library data shows that since the E-library expansion there has been a steady increase in membership and substantial increases in library app usage, downloads and borrowing of E-material. Increased use appears to have been sustained post-lockdown, over 2020. There has also been increased social media coverage and positive sentiment associated with the E-Library service.
- Extension of the existing **Studiosity** and **Lynda** online training programs at a cost of $60,000.
- A total of $684,638 in total was committed to two Community Grant Programs, including $172,466 for the **Rapid Response** Grant Program and $512,172 for the second phase **Boost Our City** Community Grant. Interviews with Rapid Response and Boost Our City recipients indicated that the funded activities (increased social contact, provision of food and essential items) resulted in increased wellbeing for clients, particularly those experiencing isolation and mental health issues. It was also felt that the Rapid Response Program has strengthened relationships between NfPs and CN, which has in turn generated goodwill towards CN.
- A social and economic incentive platform – the **Lean-In Newy App** has been developed. The app is an example of an **innovative program** that has the potential to provide long-term strategic benefits for the city. To date, there are 2,349 subscribers to the app (which has exceeded targets) and 60 businesses participating in the form of rewards.

- Three local RTOs, including the University of Newcastle, TAFE NSW and Novaskill are in the process of delivering online training programs with local SMEs and their staff to facilitate upskilling during the recovery stage of the pandemic. At the time of writing 149 students have been enrolled across the three RTO programs.

The following table summarises the early impacts for segments of the Newcastle community as identified at this stage of the evaluation:

Table 1: Early impacts of the Resilience Package by stakeholder group

Stakeholder group	Impacts
Small Business operators and staff	- Cash flow relief from the 50% discount for City of Newcastle tenants on rent through the Rent Relief Program - Potential cash flow relief through rates deferral through the Financial Hardship Program - Financial benefits associated with the Lean-In Newy App in the form of 119 redemptions of points made by app subscribers - Access to online training programs tailored to Small Business (149 students enrolled as at November 2020)
Community / NfP sector and clients	$172,466 in funds through the **Rapid Response Grant Program** to assist those in urgent need as a result of COVID-19 $512,172 in funds as part of the **Boost Our City Grant Program** to 32 local organisations to assist vulnerable community members affected by COVID-19 - Rent relief to a number of local community organisations over a six month period - Enabled select NfP organisations to pivot during the crisis to most effectively meet the needs of their clients - Purchase of technical and other equipment to allow staff to work remotely and/or manage with increased client need - Reported increased health and wellbeing for clients who received food, care packages and staff support as a result of the funding - Increased trust in CN and development of relationships with CN staff members
Broader community	- Potential cash flow relief through rates deferral through the Financial Hardship Program - Access to an increased online offering through the E-Library expansion and increased frequency of use of the platform by community members during and post lockdown - Access to free online training through Studiosity and Lynda - Discounted options at local businesses through their contribution to the community through the Lean-In Newy app.
City of Newcastle	- Capacity building for staff and the broader organisation, both program-specific and in terms of crisis response experience - Team building and strengthening of professional relationships – particularly staff on the Resilience Package project team - Increased knowledge of certain sectors, especially small business, the community and training sectors - Demonstrated leadership in a crisis situation - Generation of goodwill from community members, NfPs and businesses - Strengthening of relationships with keys groups such as the local NfP and RTO sector

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the global community in unprecedented and unpredictable ways. The ensuing social and economic impacts have amounted to the single largest crisis since WWII faced by the City of Newcastle at a local level. The New South Wales economy has suffered its biggest fall in 20 years, shrinking by 1.5 per cent during the March quarter. Newcastle is experiencing its highest unemployment rates in 17 years at 10 per cent[1]. The virus has also had major impacts on the social fabric of our society, as many have faced uncertainty, isolation and associated mental health impacts.

In response to this crisis the City of Newcastle has developed a comprehensive community and economic support package designed to help locals through the unprecedented effects of COVID-19. The package is worth $5.5 million, consists of 10 programs scheduled for roll-out over three phases between April 2020 and June 2021. These include:

- Economic incentives that maximise cash flow for small business and vulnerable residents – interest-free rate deferrals, 50% discount on rent for CN owned buildings, relaxation of a range of fees / policies, promoting local procurement.

- Direct investment in community support including $800,000 in grants for local community organisations, $500,000 for online training accreditation, a new social action / economic incentive app 'Lean-In Newy', significant expansion of the City of Newcastle's E-Library.

- The Resilience Package also proposed the formation of a City Taskforce and an initial $500,000 to support targeted and innovative support to industries most significantly affected by COVID-19. This is evaluated in a separate report provided to the City of Newcastle.

The Hunter Research Foundation Centre was commissioned to evaluate the City of Newcastle's COVID-19 Economic and Social Resilience Package. In total, nine programs were evaluated. These are summarised in the table below.

Table 2: Summary of the evaluated Resilience Package programs

Program name	Details	Cost
Financial Hardship Support	Scheme offers deferment of rates for residents and businesses that are commercial ratepayer/owner occupier or can demonstrate financial measures to support tenants.	$468,000 with a 25% take-up
Local Procurement Purchasing Support	CN will promote a new Procurement Policy to all staff, which includes a minimum local weighting assessment of 10%. Where possible this weighting will be increased through to 30 September 2020.	Approximately $535,000
Rent Relief for City Tenants	A 50% discount on rent for all CN-owned buildings for the June and September quarter.	$732,000 for six months
E-Library Expansion	A significant expansion of existing digital library	$100,000

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[1] ABS (2020) Labour Force, Australia July 2020

Program name	Details	Cost
Online Learning – Studiosity and Lynda	Promotion of CN's existing online training programs and expansion of Studiosity tutoring support.	$60,000 for extending both contracts
Community Grant Program – Rapid Response and Boost Our Community.	Financial and in-kind support to mobilise to assist non-government organisations, not-for-profits, charities and community groups to scale and respond to community need.	$800,000 in total
City Taskforce and Industry Responses	City Taskforce, led by CN, to act as the local coordinating authority to oversee the second and recovery phases of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.	Up to $500,000
Lean-In Newy App	A social action and economic incentive app utilising a digital solution to nudge, engage and propel local behaviour.	$95,560 to deliver the platform and $50,000 input from CN to fund business rewards. Total of $145,560.
Local Online Training Programs	CN supporting local small business (<20 employees) to put themselves and their staff through professional development training. Courses are offered by local Registered Training Organisations.	Up to $500,000

The following principles underpinned the development of the Resilience Package:

- Direct actions to support City of Newcastle community wellbeing;
- Timely responses that address cash-flow for small business;
- Innovative programs that provide long-term strategic benefits for the city;
- Collaboration with partners and contribution to existing initiatives; and
- Financial responsibility for the long-term sustainability of the organisation.

Timing of the delivery of the package

Planning of the package began in early March when CN staff members held conversations with key stakeholders and experts. The draft package was then presented to the Executive Leadership Team on the 18th March. The package was formally endorsed by City of Newcastle councilors 24th March. To illustrate how quickly the package was designed and implemented, the announcement of NSW lockdown measures occurred between the 16th and 31st March, with the Federal fiscal support packages, including JobKeeper announced on the 30th March 2020 (first payments made available during the first week of May). The CN Resilience Package was approved on the 24th March 2020, one week before the announcement of the Federal support JobKeeper. The City of Newcastle's Resilience Package was announced early on in the pandemic, in line with other early movers like the City of Melbourne (18th March) and the City of Sydney (20th March).

METHODOLOGY

The following table summarises the methodology to evaluate each of the programs.

Table 3: COVID-19 Resilience Package – Program evaluation methodology

Initiative	Proposed methodology
Financial Hardship Support	Track take-up, track deferred expenditure.
Procurement Purchasing Support	Analysis of program data
Rent relief for City Tenants	Analysis of program data
E-Library expansion	Analysis of longitudinal data on E-Library subscriptions, can compare pre and post COVID. Online survey with subscribers.
Online learning – Studiosity and Lynda	Analysis of subscriber data / online survey of participants.
Community Grant Program	Analysis of program data. Semi-structured interviews with not-for-profit recipients. Case studies.
City Taskforce and Industry responses	Analysis of program minutes/other documentation. Semi-structured interviews with Taskforce members.
'Lean-in Newy'	Analysis of dollars generated. Analysis of take-up/engagement. Analysis of web-site to document solutions brokered – citizen as agent of change. Case studies. Online survey with GreenBe app users.
Local Online Training Programs	Semi-structured interviews with RTOS.

Available program data has been analysed and interviews have taken place with Program Managers of the Community Grant, Online Training Program, E-Library and Studiosity and Lynda Programs. Interviews have also been undertaken with six recipients of the Grants Program and the three RTOs that received funding under the Online Training Program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BEST PRACTICE RESPONSE

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the global community in unprecedented and unpredictable ways. The ensuing social and economic impacts have amounted to the single largest crisis since WWII faced by the City of Newcastle at a local level. Newcastle has a history of collectively responding in the midst of challenges, such as the 1989 earthquake, the closure of BHP in 1999, and the 2007 Pasha Bulka storms. Newcastle is an emerging global city well positioned to respond to the local community and economic challenges of COVID-19. Newcastle is resilient and dynamic; and welcomes the piloting of new programs and approaches. Newcastle is also a gateway to both global and regional connections servicing Northern and North Western NSW regional communities meaning that the City has an important role to play in restarting and providing new job opportunities for the future.

Leadbeater[2] (2013) argues that disaster recovery should be community focused and tailored to community need. The City of Newcastle's COVID-19 Economic and Social Resilience Package was created with the aim of assisting segments of the Newcastle community likely to be most affected by the impacts of the virus – namely vulnerable community members, recently unemployed and SMEs.

Dr Marcia Keegan, Associate and Partner at SGS Economics & Planning, has highlighted CN's economic and social resilience plan as national best practice in how local governments in designing COVID pandemic responses ought best to focus on the needs of SMEs in their own communities and fill in the gaps in Federal and State government support.[3]

The Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative[4] recognise there are three important leadership tasks that underlie all other aspects of the work of responding to a crisis.

- Assessment of where "*you are in the life cycle of the crisis*" to inform the ways in which you allocate your attention and activities and organise the work.

- The second is to establish a problem-solving process for a novel threat, which may see departure from routine process --rapid integration of new (and incomplete) information, learning on the fly, and nimble reactions to emergent issues.

- The third is to understand the political aspects and identify risks to be managed to maintain safety and order, secure and retain support, and create the conditions for effective collaboration under extreme circumstances.

The Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative describe the process of 'teaming' in a crisis as teamwork on the fly that includes "collaboration across boundaries without the luxury of stable team structures". Some of the challenges of teaming in crisis that are relevant to the City of Newcastle as they navigated the uncertainty of COVID-19 include:

- Facing many unknowns;

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[2] Leadbeater, A. (2013) Community Leadership in Disaster Recovery: A Case Study
[3] Keegan, M (2020) Resilience of Australian local economies in the time of Corona
https://lgiu.org/briefing/implications-of-covid-19-on-the-australian-economy/
[4] Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative "Leading the Local Response to the COVID-19 Event".

- The need for different expertise at different stages;
- Lack of fixed roles and deliverables;
- Having to do things that have never been done before;
- The need to act in order to learn; and
- Responses are agile, iterative and fraught with challenges.

In particular, Bloomberg Harvard discuss the need to do things differently during a crisis, such as acting quickly on what is known, focusing on solving problems and engaging in constant updating[5]. Put simply, Council had little time to wait for additional information, and instead they acted quickly and decisively in developing the Resilience Package.

HRFC Briefings

The HRFC presented fortnightly briefings on evidence of best practice government responses to COVID-19 from around the globe. These briefings targeted local government mandates and covered a range of economic and social topics to ensure that CN was at the cutting edge of best practice with regard to response to COVID-19 (Attachment A). The briefings were important given that council was working in a relatively novel way in response to a once in a century pandemic. Council staff needed to be actively seeking and gathering information in order to learn from others and be iterative in their approach. The briefings and embedded evaluation also recognised that the City of Newcastle were not seeking to hold fast to the initial iterations of their COVID response designs, but were seeking to learn and evolve throughout the crisis.

Other similarly sized cities across Australia also responded with support packages from March/April. The City of Geelong delivered a six stage COVID support package with the first stage commencing on 24 March that included a waiver of rent/fees and development of a Business Support Portal for local businesses, and a second package delivering a COVID-19 financial hardship policy, small business online training programs and support for digitising local arts, culture and heritage. In addition to continuing the COVID-19 financial hardship policy (waving many council fees and charges) in subsequent stages Geelong also introduced quick response grants for community groups, opened a community winter pool, a tourism and events campaign, further funding for heritage, arts and culture initiatives, a small business expert program and free parking in Central Geelong. Wollongong City Council have also offered rate relief for residents and businesses across Wollongong Local Government Area. City of Sydney in April committed to a $72.5 million to a small business, cultural and creative support package to reduce the financial impact of COVID-19. This package included a number of relief grants such as $10,000 per business small business grant, cultural sector resilience grant, creative fellowship grants, community service grants and quick response grants.

Promotion of the Resilience Package

CN staff have presented details of the Package to the following organisations:

- Local Government Professionals NSW
- Economic Development Network
- Newcastle Business Club
- Business Improvement Association / Hunter Business Chamber briefing

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[5] Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative (2020) Leading Diverse and Dispersed Teams in Times of Crisis https://www.cityleadership.harvard.edu/sessions/2020/3/19-9wer5-f4d2a-m83je-97zmf-n48pp-dwp6f-j9nyg-446cw-h45wk

- Strategy & Innovation Committee of Council
- City of Newcastle Ordinary Council March Meeting

This has offered CN staff excellent networking and professional development opportunities.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP PROGRAM

Program description

The Financial Hardship program provides support to Newcastle LGA residents to develop payment plans for their property rates, in recognition of the financial hardship associated with COVID. This includes the offer for all fees and charges associated with their property rates, including interest penalties, to be waived until 30 June 2021. The application process has been stream-lined with phone assistance available. Commercial ratepayers have also been offered financial support on the condition that they are an owner-occupier or can demonstrate financial measures to support tenants. The aim of the program is to reduce financial stress for households and businesses. Providing interest-free rate relief packages will cost CN approximately $468,000 with a 25 per cent take-up.

Appropriateness

The Financial Hardship Program offers cash relief to residents and business operators using an 'opt in' approach for those experiencing financial hardship. The program aligns with the key resilience package aim to support City of Newcastle community wellbeing.

Implementation process

The Financial Hardship Program was implemented swiftly in late March and 65 payment plans were in place by the 1st April. A conversation with the CN Program Manager indicated that there was some confusion from residents when the program was announced as some interpreted that they would receive a discount on their rates, rather than an interest-free deferral. CN customer service staff received many phone calls from residents' requesting a rates reduction, and staff were required to clarify that the offer was an interest-free deferral. This was met with some dissatisfaction amongst members of the public. In addition, another element of the program that appeared to create confusion was that some residents assumed that all rate payers were eligible for interest-free payments in the event of late payments, whether the deferral was applied for or not. Some CN customer service representatives were also initially informed that that this was the case, further fuelling confusion. It was felt that clearer communication both on the rates notice and through social media, as well as internally, could have avoided this confusion.

In addition, it was felt that the program would have benefitted from clear eligibility criteria from the outset. For those seeking less than a 12 month deferral, decision-making was made on a case-by-case basis. In addition, there have been examples of those granted a short-term deferral requiring follow up due to non-payment within the time period. This has resulted in an increased workload for members of the Finance Team. The Finance Team developed a separate assessment process for businesses and residents. In retrospect the eligibility criteria may have been able to have been simplified by deeming that all individuals/businesses that received JobKeeper/JobSeeker were eligible for a 12 month interest free rent deferrals, however the rent

relief program was established prior to the Australian government's introduction of these COVID support programs.

As of 10th July 2020 761 payment plans were in place for both businesses and residents experiencing financial difficulty as a result of COVID-19, to the value of approximately $1.1M. Telephone calls to the City of Newcastle rates enquiry queue during the week of the 22nd May were up by almost a third from the same period 12 months' ago. The approval of plans over time is shown in the graph below.

To request a deferral of rates payment to June 2021, residents and businesses were required to complete a formal application form. Approximately 60 ratepayers to date have completed written applications at an estimated value of $800K. It was felt that some residents were reluctant to complete the form as it required disclosure of income and expenditure information. This is potentially another example where establishing eligibility on the basis of receipt of JobKeeper/JobSeeker may have helped simplify the programs eligibility criteria and application process.

Figure 1   Financial Hardship Payment Plans (761 plans in total, $1.1M in value)
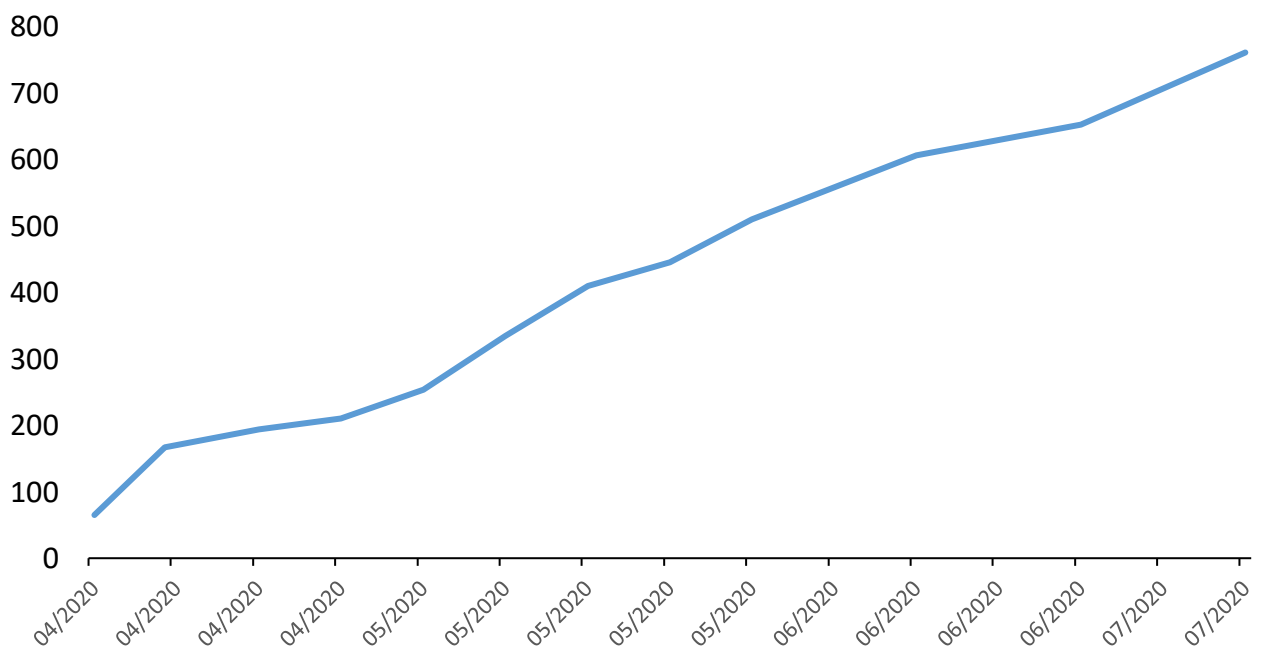
Source: City of Newcastle.

At the time of writing 311 payment plans equal to $1.16M were in place. It is assumed that the drop in the number of payment plans has occurred because many rates' payers have now paid their accounts.

PROCUREMENT PURCHASING SUPPORT

Program description
A new City of Newcastle Procurement Policy has been implemented, which includes a minimum local weighting assessment of 10% and faster payment processes for contractors. The intention was that this local weighting would be increased through to 30 September 2020. The aim of this policy is to increase support for local businesses via City of Newcastle supply-chains, and to increase the number of local businesses who remain solvent. Local businesses will continue to receive payments as soon as approved with invoices paid on a seven day payment term.

Appropriateness
The program aligns with the overarching resilience package aim to provide timely responses that address cash-flow for small business.

Implementation process
Importantly, CN's CFO personally emphasised the importance of fast-tracking approvals to all program staff according to a City of Newcastle memo dated 3/4/20.

Outcomes
In the first week of implementation (mid April) the weekly creditors run to contractors and suppliers was $6.1 million which is $2.7 million more than the average creditors run. The second week was $5.4 million and $1.8 million more than the average pay run. The timing of the program is significant as it coincided with the NSW lockdown which began at the end of March. Following an initial spike of $4.5 million, total weekly payments flattened and have returned to normal.

RENT RELIEF FOR CITY TENANTS

Program description
The Rent Relief program offers a 50% discount on rent for all CN-owned buildings for the June and September quarters of 2020. It aims to provide immediate cash-flow relief for all small businesses and community organisations operating out of these premises. The rationale for this program is that it will provide financial assistance to help businesses and community organisations remain solvent. The program was implemented in early April, and delivered $28,000 in saving to City of Newcastle tenants per week.

A total of $732,000 in rent relief was provided to 60 businesses and community organisations over a six month period. Recipients included a number of prominent community-based organisations including nine community childcare centres across the LGA, ten local bowling clubs, community halls (such as Girl Guides and Scouts Hall), Merewether Surf House, pavilions and beach kiosks at Newcastle and Stockton beaches.

Appropriateness
The Rent Relief demonstrates CN's commitment to assisting small business as rent represents a large proportion of business expenses. The program aligns with the broader resilience package aim to provide timely responses that address cash-flow for small business.

Implementation process
Unfortunately, at the time of writing we have been unable to consult with the Program Manager despite numerous attempts to contact.

Outcomes

A total of $732,000 in rent relief was provided over a six month period. The program finished at the end of September 2020, with no plans to continue.

E-LIBRARY EXPANSION

Program description

This program has involved a significant expansion of the existing digital library with the aim of increasing wellbeing, enjoyment and online learning opportunities for City of Newcastle Library (which includes eight branches) subscribers during periods of isolation. The following services were already available to Library Members and additional titles and increased content was made possible through the expansion funding:

- Four e-book and e-audio platforms with thousands of titles including latest release and popular titles; Funding was used to procure additional copies to reduce wait times for popular titles;
- Storybox library –a video story streaming platform that has well-known Australian authors and TV personalities;
- A platform called Press reader that has a wide range of international and regional newspapers;
- A platform called RB Digital that offers a huge range of e-magazines;
- Two movie streaming platforms (Kanopy and Beamafilm) that contain over 30,000 movies, documentaries, kids and wellness content; Funding was used to increase the number of free movies Members could stream;
- Medici TV – funding was used to subscribe to this streaming platform that offers a range of online opera and classical music concerts;
- Freegal-A music streaming platform that offers access to around 15 million songs including entire Sony Music Recording catalogue; and
- National Geographic online plus a large range of learning databases including Ancestry.com and Find My Past. These family history sites had particularly significant growth in use during the shutdown period and beyond.

The cost of the expansion to CN is $100,000. The library has 90,000 active members with a high level of user satisfaction. This is gauged through a survey with members conducted every two years. There may be potential to mirror some of the questions from this survey for evaluation purposes.

Appropriateness

Newcastle Library has one of the largest digital library offerings in Australia, also boasting one of the largest membership bases as a proportion of the population for library members in NSW. It is therefore an appropriate use of resources to provide such an engaged membership with additional online resources to occupy and educate during lockdown.

The expansion aligns with two overarching aims of the resilience package: to deliver direct actions to support City of Newcastle community wellbeing and to generate innovative programs that provide long-term strategic benefits for the city.

Implementation process

The E-Library expansion was implemented in early April. A conversation with the E-Library Program Manager indicated that Council had a large offering of online resources ready to be

shared and was able to mobilise the expansion quickly, in large part due to timely release of internal funding. Using the expansion funding, 13,000 additional multi-use titles were purchased during this period, to enable more people to access e-books and e-audio books concurrently. There were also 1,500 top-ups of existing single use titles, to decrease wait times with popular titles and fulfilment of an additional 235 specific purchase requests from the community during the lockdown period. In addition, a broad range of online programs were offered, including story time, podcasts, craft sessions and discussions with authors. Weekly meetings were held internally eep track of program milestones.

Feedback

As part of the evaluation, an online survey was administered with members of the City of Newcastle's libraries. The aim of the survey was to understand patterns of usage before, during and after the lockdown period and gather feedback about the program offering of the E-Library, including feedback on Lynda and Studiosity. The survey was active between the 2nd to the 23rd October. The response rate was impressive with 567 responses.

Survey respondents were more likely to be female (female 78%, male 21%), over 55 years of age (65%), a couple family with or without children (71%) and have been a member of the library for over two years (86%).

Of the survey participants (n = 567), almost two-thirds (64%) had used the E-Library, and almost two-thirds (62%) of the respondents had been using it for over a year.

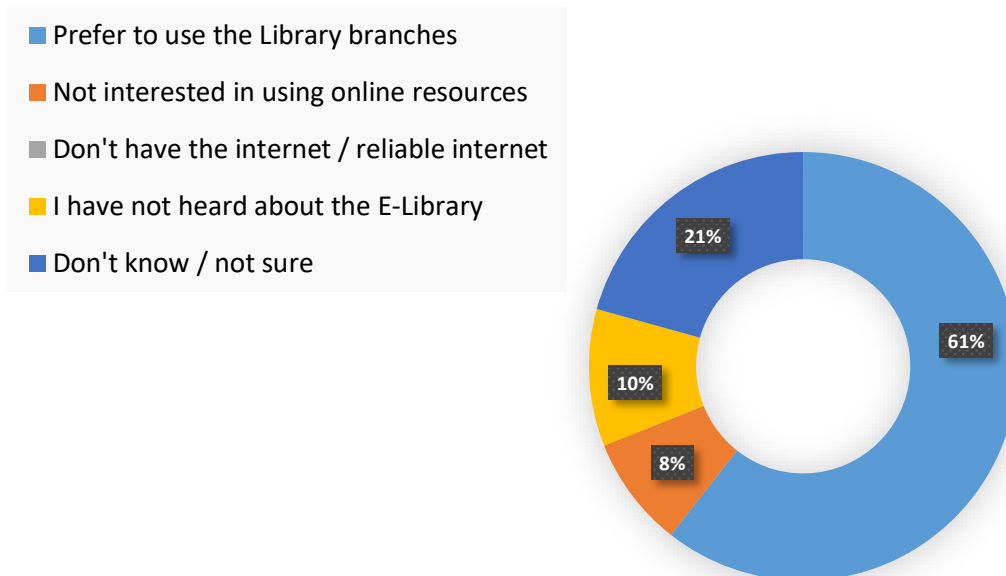**Figure 2 How long have you been using the E-Library?**
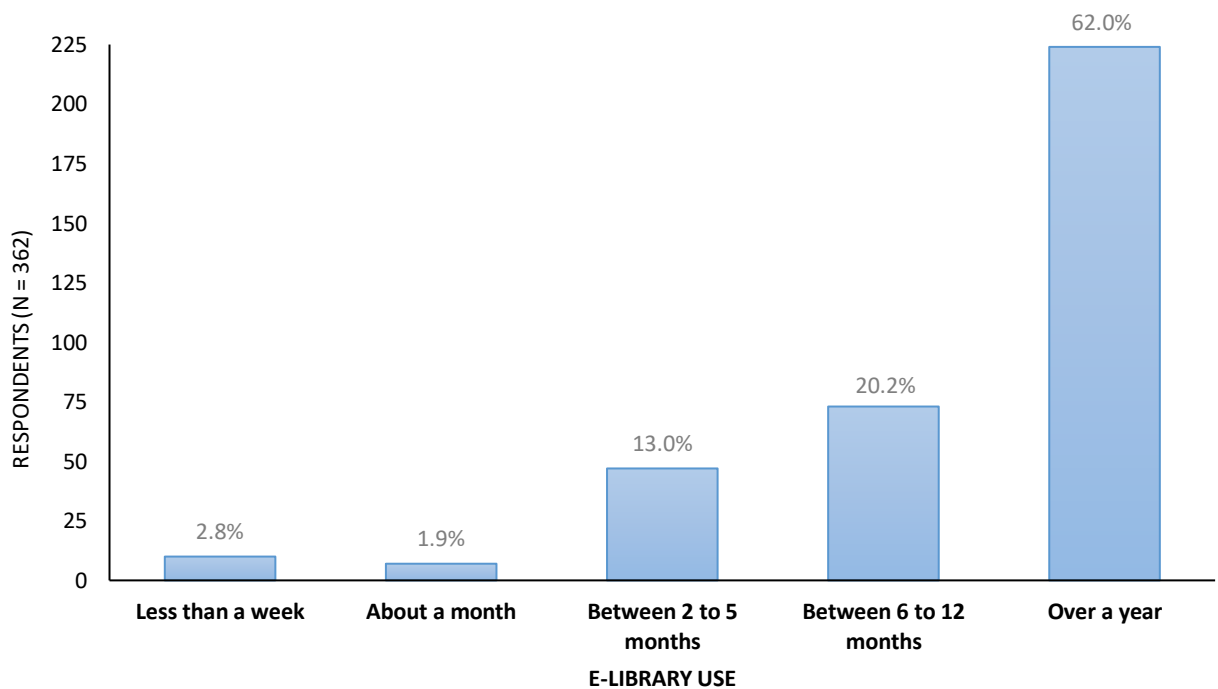
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Those who had not used the E-Library (n=203) were asked the reason for this and the majority (61%) noted that they prefer to visit library branches in-person. A further 21% responded that they were unsure of the reason and 10% were not aware of the E-Library.

In total 86 E-library users (24% of survey respondents) reported that they had not used the E-library resources prior to COVID. These were more likely to be middle-aged (40-44 years, 45-49 years and 50-54 years) patrons than either younger or older age groups.

**Figure 3 What is the reason that you have not used the E-Library?**

- ■ Prefer to use the Library branches
- ■ Not interested in using online resources
- ■ Don't have the internet / reliable internet
- ■ I have not heard about the E-Library
- ■ Don't know / not sure

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Feedback from CN staff indicated that there were some delays in the communication and promotion of the E-Library expansion and that this may have affected awareness and take-up. It was also felt that the messaging could have more clearly indicated that the E-Library was a pre-existing service and that City of Newcastle were expanding in response to COVID-19. This sentiment was echoed by survey respondents with almost half indicating they were not aware of the E-library content increase in response to COVID-19. When survey participants were asked if they had suggestions for general E-Library improvements, some indicated that more promotion of additional content would be beneficial.

"I think the library should promote it more. I didn't know about it until a librarian spoke to me about it just before the lockdown."

"You should advertise it more. Most people I know aren't even aware it's a thing"

Figure 4 Were you aware that the E-Library content had been increased in response to COVID-19?
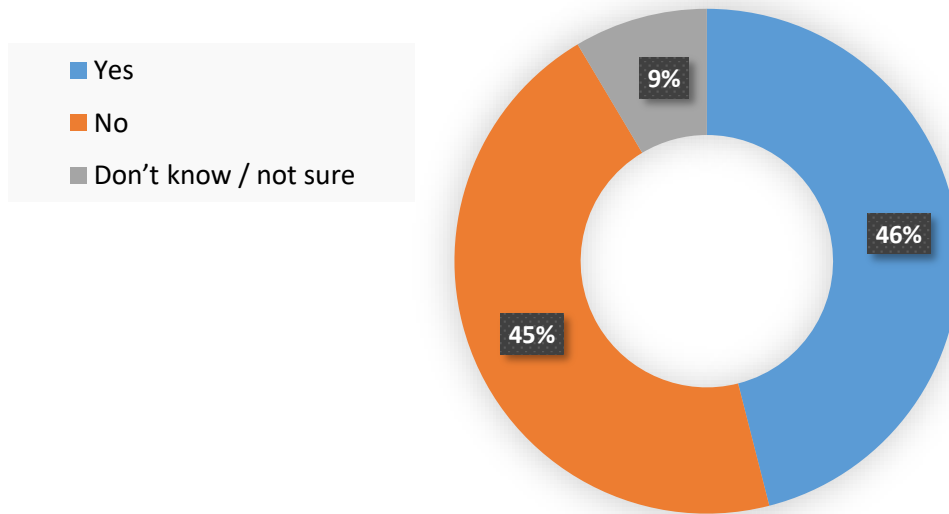
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

The City of Newcastle Library team spent time making outbound calls to library members with the aim of checking in with Members and advising of the library offerings, including the E-Library, while the library branches were closed. In total, 3,320 outbound calls were made by staff between the 1st April and the 3rd June 2020.

Some respondents of the E-Library noted that this telephone assistance from Newcastle library staff was extremely beneficial:

"I purchased a Kobo eReader and after a phone consultation with Library staff it was easy to download and enjoy ebooks. Great technical staff"

"After a phone consultation with library staff I found it easy to download and read ebooks from my new Kobo eReader"

"Extremely easy and convenient, efficient and effective. Great librarian backup when needed, usually well above and beyond "the call of duty"."

When E-Library users were asked where they got their information:

"I actually received a phone call from a library person who discussed what was available during Lockdown. It really was an excellent gesture."

"Library staff member rang and told me about it"

Interestingly, feedback from CN staff suggested that the COVID response highlighted that the team responsible for delivery of library services have not adequately promoted their program

offering internally in the past. This was demonstrated through limited awareness amongst CN staff from other departments about some of the library programs, including online learning applications.

Survey respondents were asked where they found information about the E-Library service and 35% identified their local library branch as the source of information, while 27% of participants indicated they found information via advertising and promotion.

Figure 5 Where have you found information about the E-Library, including content?
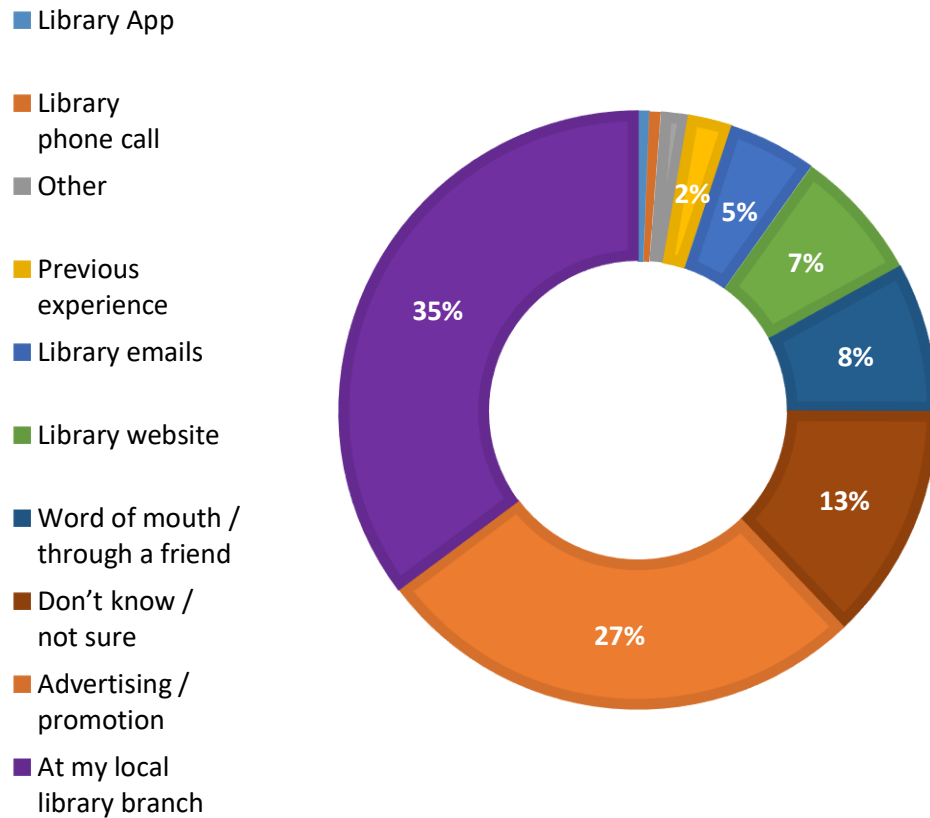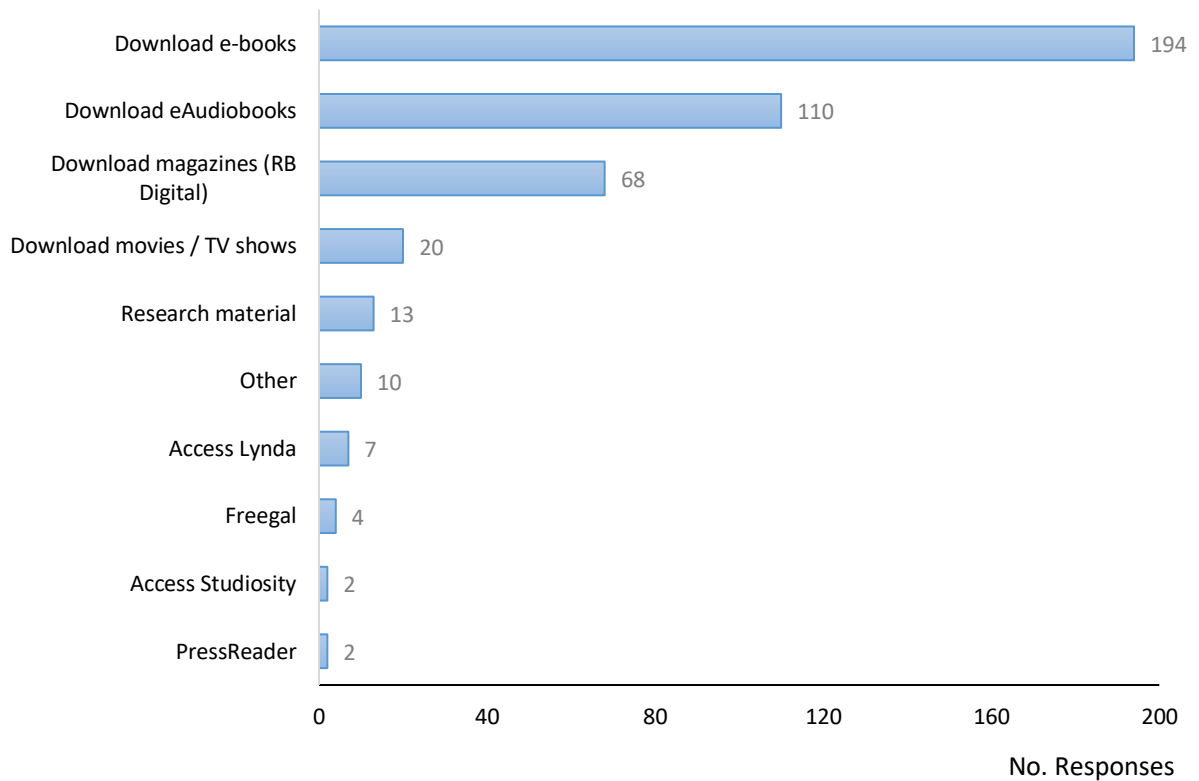

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Comparison of use before, during and after the COVID-19 lockdown period

The E-Library users who used the E-Library prior to lockdown (n=253) mostly used it to download e-books and/or eAudiobooks in this pre-COVID period.
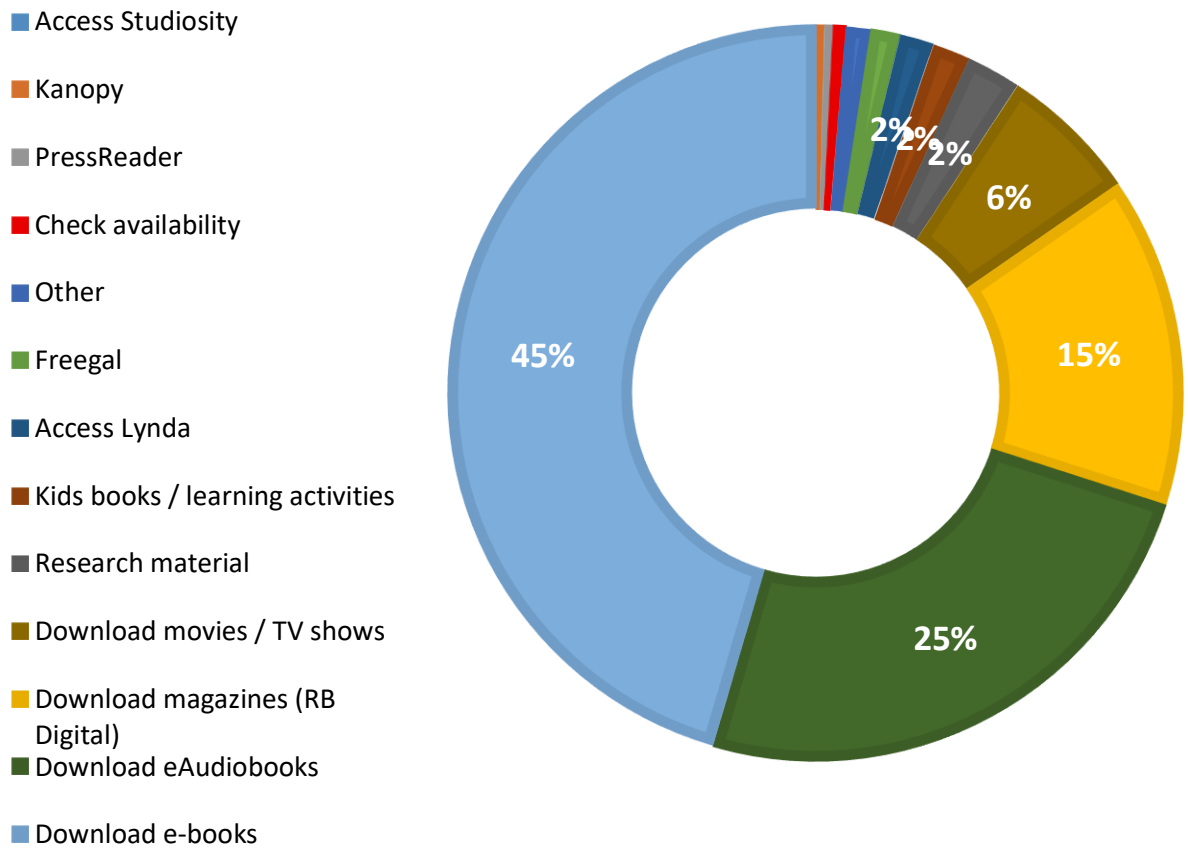
Figure 6 PRIOR to the COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020), what were the main activities you would access the E-Library for?

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Respondents who used the E-Library service during lockdown (n= 353) also mostly used it to download e-books and/or eAudiobooks specifically during lockdown period. However, there was a 26.8% increase in the number of respondents who downloaded e-books and a 20.9% increase reported in the number of people who downloaded eAudiobooks during lockdown compared to pre-lockdown. No respondents reported using Studiosity during lockdown.

Figure 7 DURING the COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020), what were the main activities you have accessed the E-Library for?

- Access Studiosity
- Kanopy
- PressReader
- Check availability
- Other
- Freegal
- Access Lynda
- Kids books / learning activities
- Research material
- Download movies / TV shows
- Download magazines (RB Digital)
- Download eAudiobooks
- Download e-books

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Change of frequency of E-Library use prior, during and after the lockdown

The survey indicated that 72% used the E-Library prior to the lockdown. Of these, 46% reported using the E-Library more frequently during lockdown.
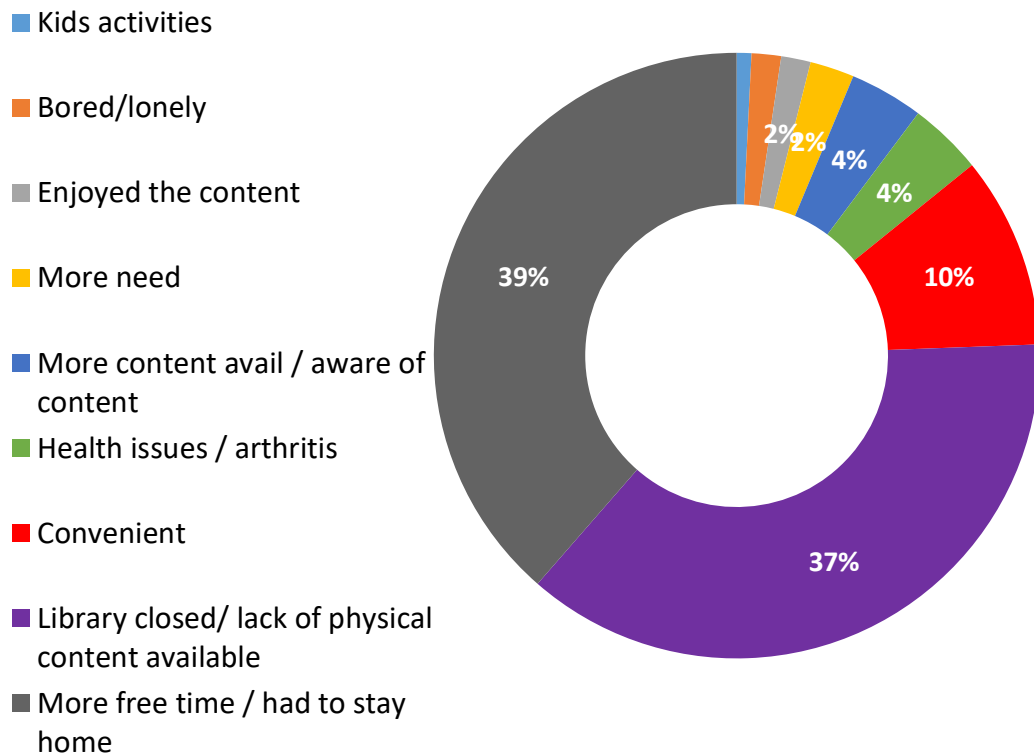
Figure 8 DURING the COVID-19 lockdown, would you say you accessed the E-Library:
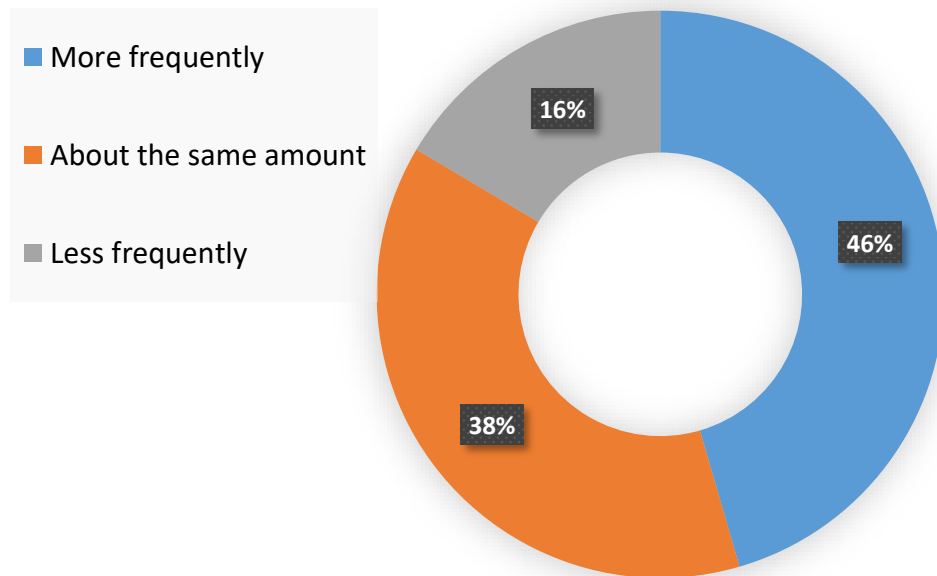
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.
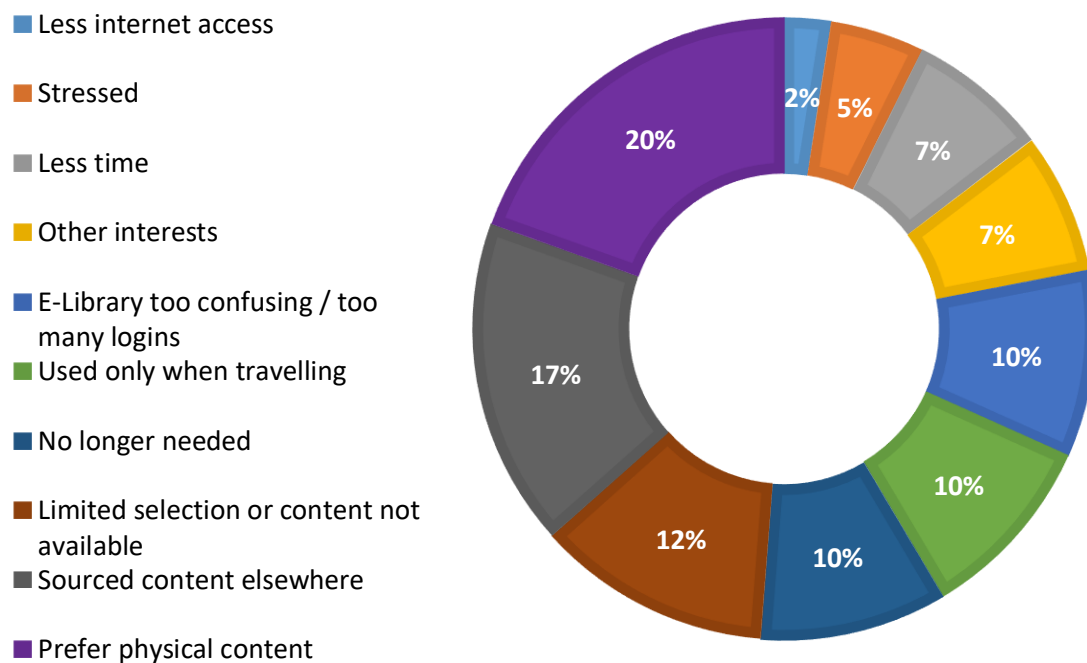
Survey respondents who had used the E-Library prior to the lockdown were asked for the reason why their frequency of use of the E-Library changed after lockdown. Those who used the E-Library 'more frequently' during lockdown noted this was due to more time at home and because they were unable to access library branches. Those who responded that they used the E-Library resources 'less frequently' mostly expressed a preference for physical content and resources (i.e. books), other commonly expressed reasons were a preference for other sources of content and dissatisfaction with the limited content available through the E-Library.

Figure 9 Reasons for more frequent visits during lockdown

- Kids activities
- Bored/lonely
- Enjoyed the content
- More need
- More content avail / aware of content
- Health issues / arthritis
- Convenient
- Library closed/ lack of physical content available
- More free time / had to stay home

2% 2% 4% 4% 10% 37% 39%

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Figure 10 Reasons for less frequent visits during lockdown

- Less internet access
- Stressed
- Less time
- Other interests
- E-Library too confusing / too many logins
- Used only when travelling
- No longer needed
- Limited selection or content not available
- Sourced content elsewhere
- Prefer physical content


2% 5% 7% 7% 10% 10% 10% 12% 17% 20%

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

The frequency of use of all E-Library users during the lockdown was then compared with the frequency of use after the lockdown period had ended. Pleasingly, 73% respondents reported

using the E-Library after lockdown either more frequently or about the same amount as used during lockdown. This confirms that for many increased usage has been sustained, and demonstrates the long term value add provided by the program for the community.

Figure 11 AFTER the lockdown (i.e. since social distancing restrictions have been relaxed), would you say you have accessed the E-Library
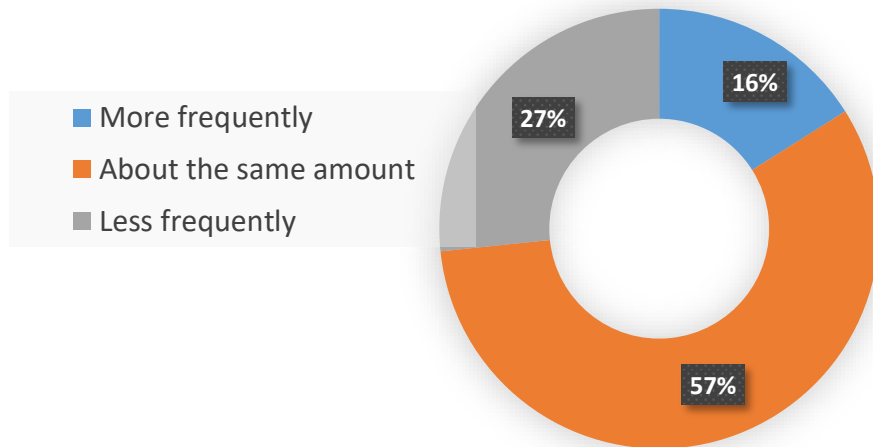
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Those respondents (n=93) who had accessed the E-Library more frequently after lockdown indicated this was due to convenience and enjoyment of the content. Given the motivation and chance to trial a new way of consuming content has led many to prefer this virtual alternative. The open-ended responses to *'What is the reason you visit the E-Library more frequently?'* reveal:

"Love it"

"Feel like reading books again as normality returns. Prefer online borrowing to visiting library branch."

"Easy and convenient"

"Lockdown firstly but also convenient and easy to use"

"I got used to it, and it's very convenient"

"Have developed a new appreciation for audiobooks and find the borrowbox app had improved."
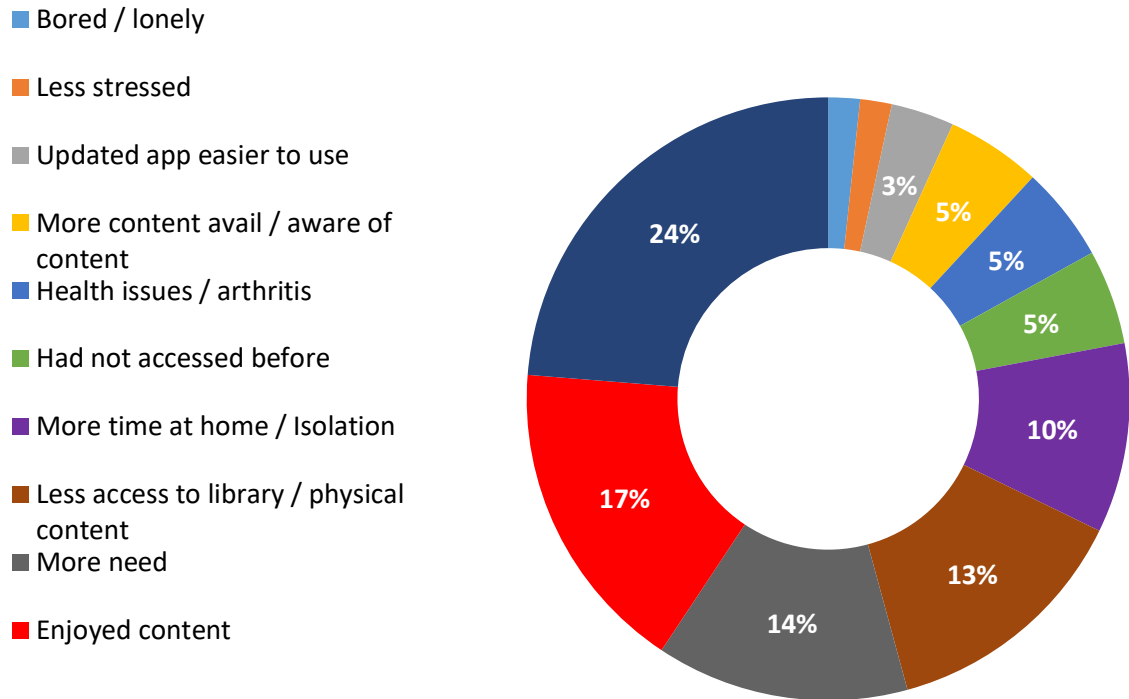
"Realised what was available and how easy (and wonderful) it was to borrow audiobooks."

"Forgot how much reading is better than TV"

"Learned that I prefer audiobooks to podcasts or radio while I am walking or doing hand craft"

Figure 12 Reasons for more frequent visits after lockdown

- Bored / lonely
- Less stressed
- Updated app easier to use
- More content avail / aware of content
- Health issues / arthritis
- Had not accessed before
- More time at home / Isolation
- Less access to library / physical content
- More need
- Enjoyed content

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

The overwhelming response from participants using the E-Library less frequently after the lockdown was that they preferred physical books and/or visiting the bricks and mortar library.

**Figure 13 Reasons for less frequent visits after lockdown**

- Only used when travelling
- No need to visit
- Less internet access
- Less borrowing capacity
- E-Library too confusing / too many logins
- Sourced content elsewhere
- Other interests
- Limited selection or not available
- Less time / back at work
- Prefer physical books / library
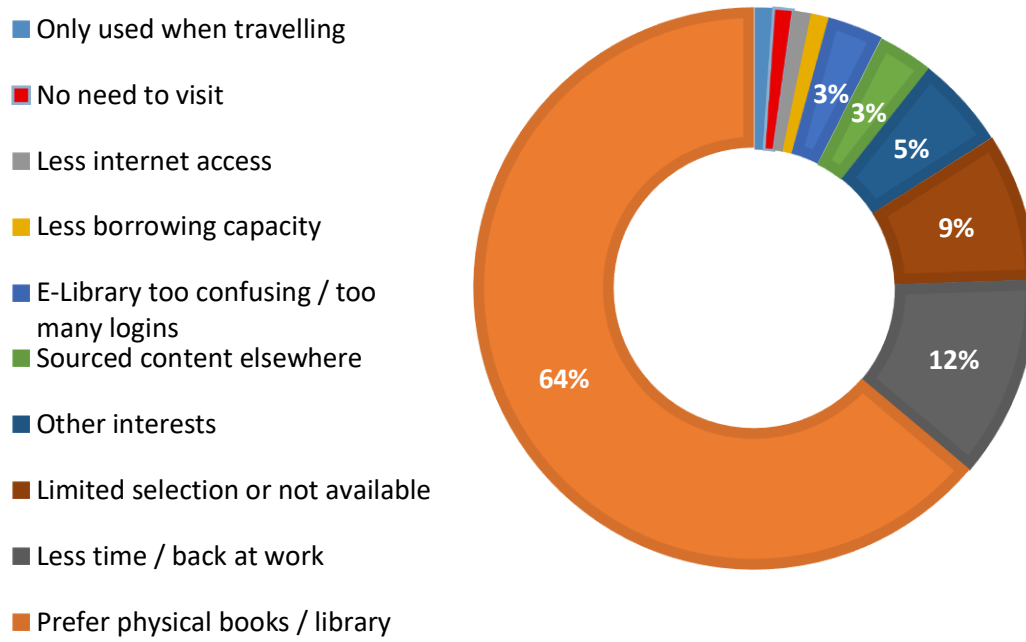
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Online versions of programs created in response to COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 lockdown, the City of Newcastle created and delivered online versions of programs including story times, podcasts, workshops and tutorials. The E-Library users were asked if they had seen and used any of these programs. The majority had not (86%). Of the respondents (n=36) that indicated that they had seen and used the programs (n=36), over a third had used Storytime (which includes Live Storytime/Rock n Rhyme on Facebook, Rainbow Storytime, Babybook time/story stomp/rock n rhyme online) and just under a third watched Author Talks. This response may be influenced by the age of the sample, as surevy respondents were skewed toward older age groups. Of the 36 users, 76% reporting they were either satisfied or very satisfied (with 46% indicating that they were very satisfied) overall.

Figure 14 Have you seen and used any online versions of programs?
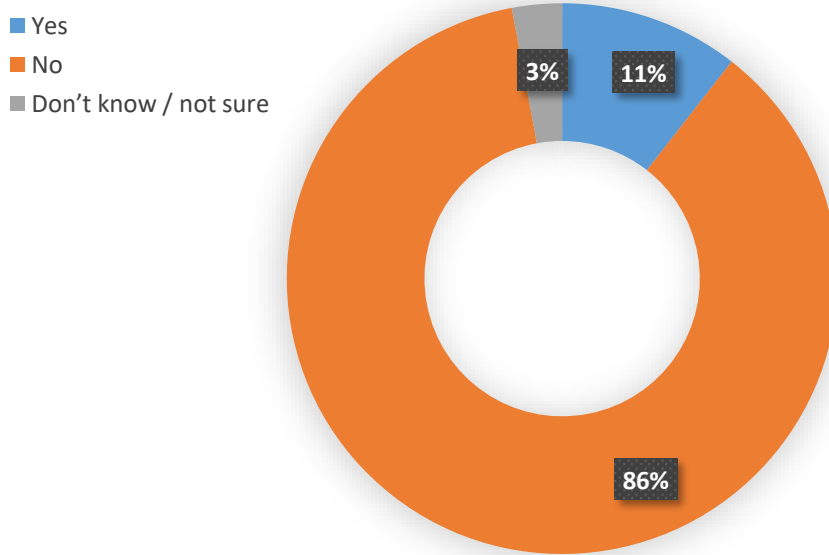
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

**Figure 15 Which of the following programs have you seen or used?**

- **Everyone has a story to tell**
- **Webinars**
- **Family History Programs**
- **Don't know / not sure**
- **Create 2020 Maker tutorials**
- **Create children's workshop series**
- **Online exhibitions**
- **Lego Club/Crafternoon/ Little bang discovery club**
- **Podcast series**
- **Author Talks**
- **Storytime**
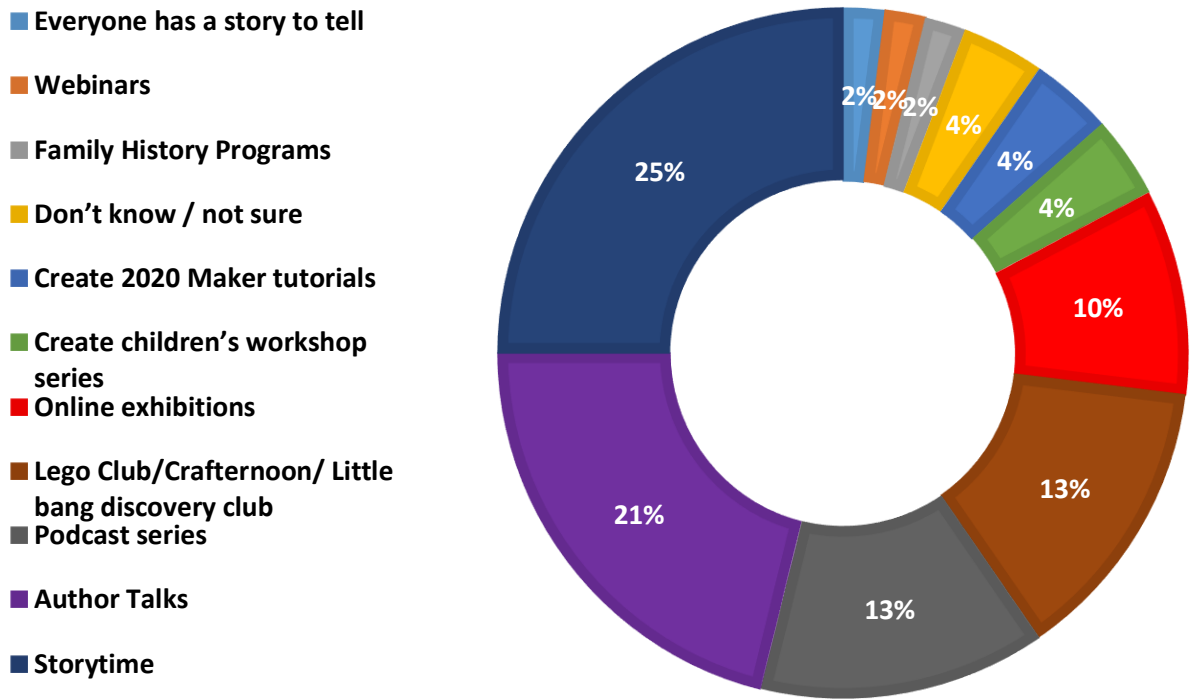
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Overall feedback of E-Library

When asked if they would continue to use the E-Library, 82% of E-Library users indicated that they would use the E-Library now that restrictions had eased. Almost half, 49%, reported they would use the E-Library to supplement their in-person loans, while 19% of participants responded that they would use E-Library exclusively.

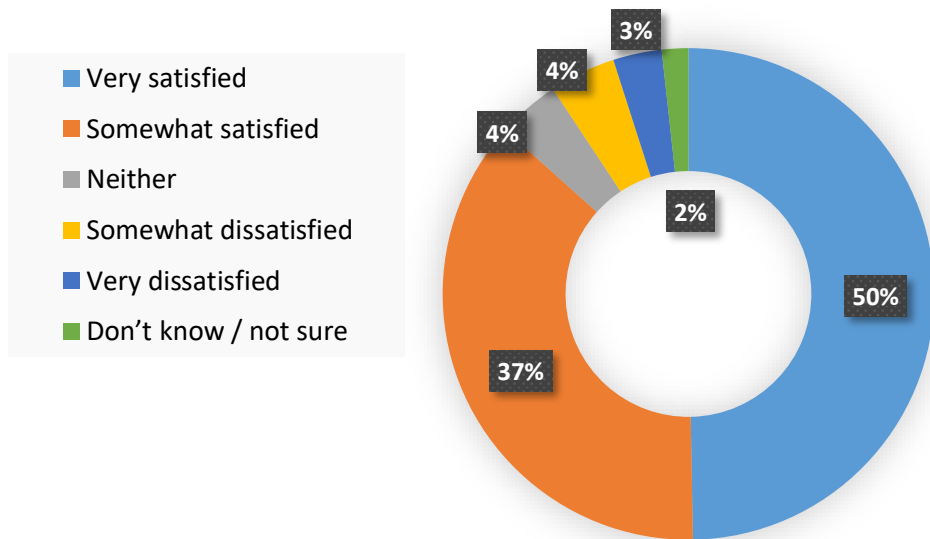**Figure 16 Will you continue to use the E-Library now that lockdown restrictions have been eased and libraries have reopened?**
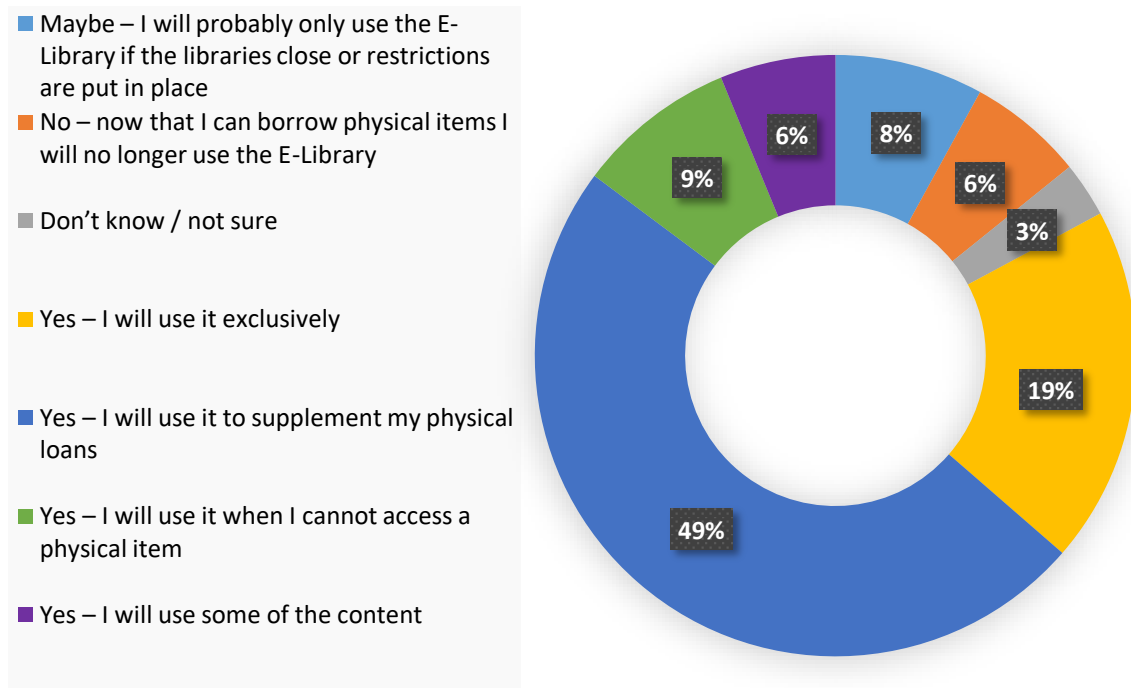
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

## Overall Satisfaction of the E-Library

Significantly, 87% of E-Library users were satisfied with the E-Library, with 50% indicating they were very satisfied. In addition, only 7% of respondents indicated being dissatisfied. Pleasingly, 70% of E-Library users said that they had recommended the E-Library to someone. Once again, this demonstrates that the program has been well received and is likely to continue to add value for the community in the future.

Figure 17 How satisfied were you overall with the E-Library content that you accessed?

Legend:
- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don't know / not sure

50%, 37%, 4%, 4%, 3%, 2%

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Figure 18 Have you recommended the E-Library service to anyone?

Legend:
- Yes
- No
- Don't know / not sure

70%, 26%, 4%
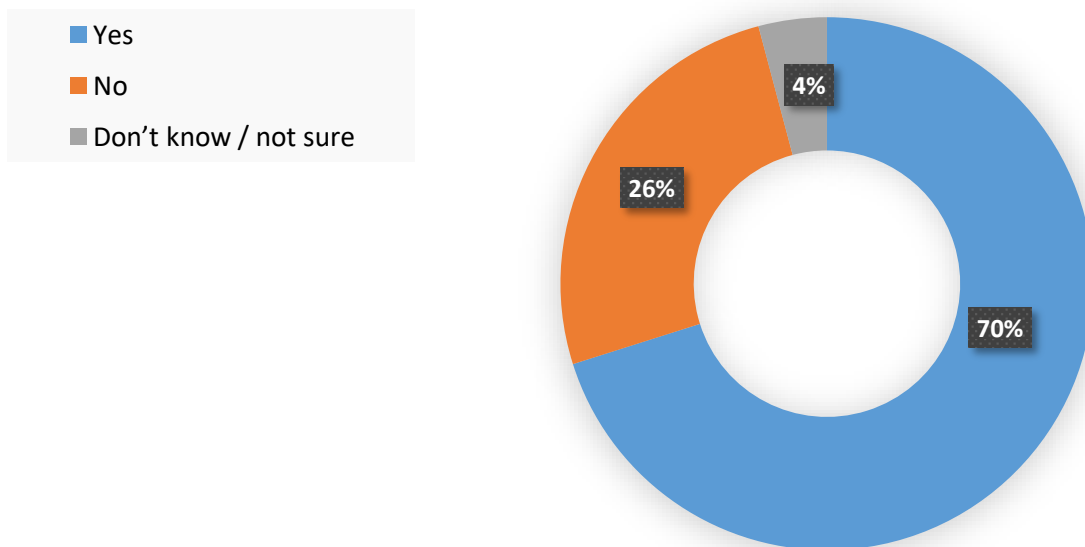
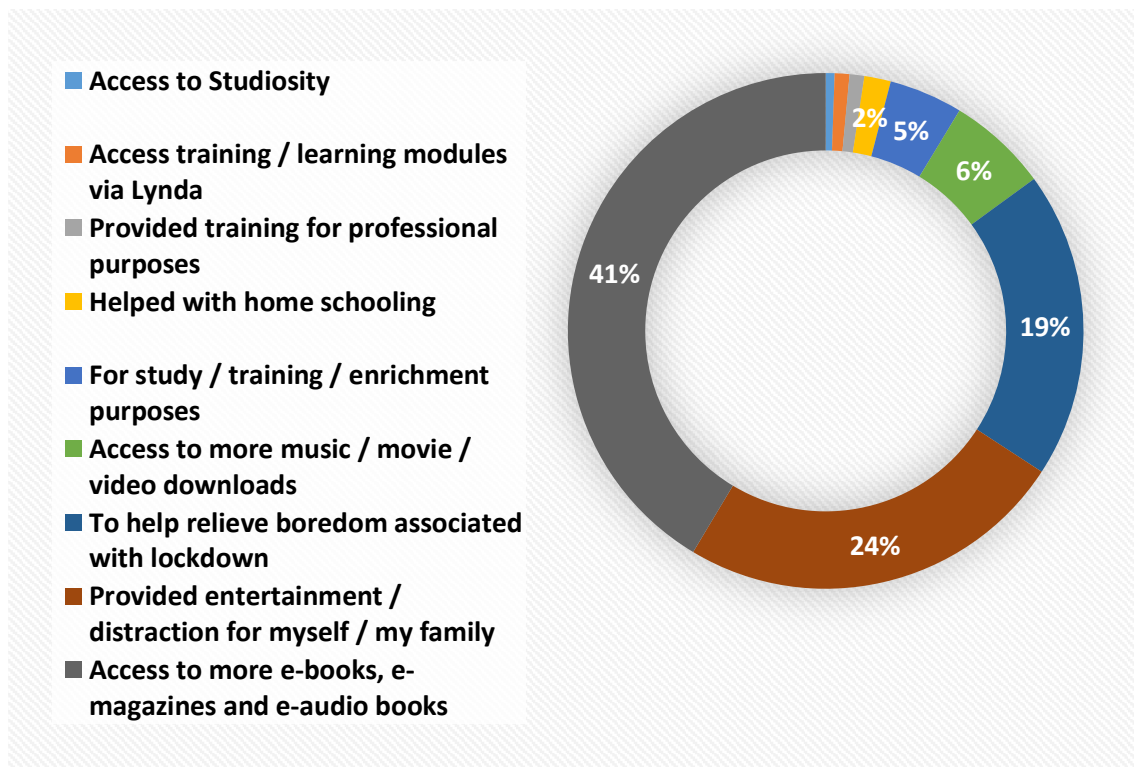Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Positively, three-quarters (n=253) of the sample felt that access to the E-Library benefited them or their family either during or after lockdown. This is significant, as it indicates the E-Library met one of its key aims to support residents during and after lockdown. The most commonly identified main benefit came from e-books, e-magazines and e-audio books, followed by the provision of entertainment, as a distraction, and helping to relieve boredom associated with the lockdown.

Figure 19 Do you feel that access to the E-Library during lockdown or since COVID-19 has benefited you or your family?
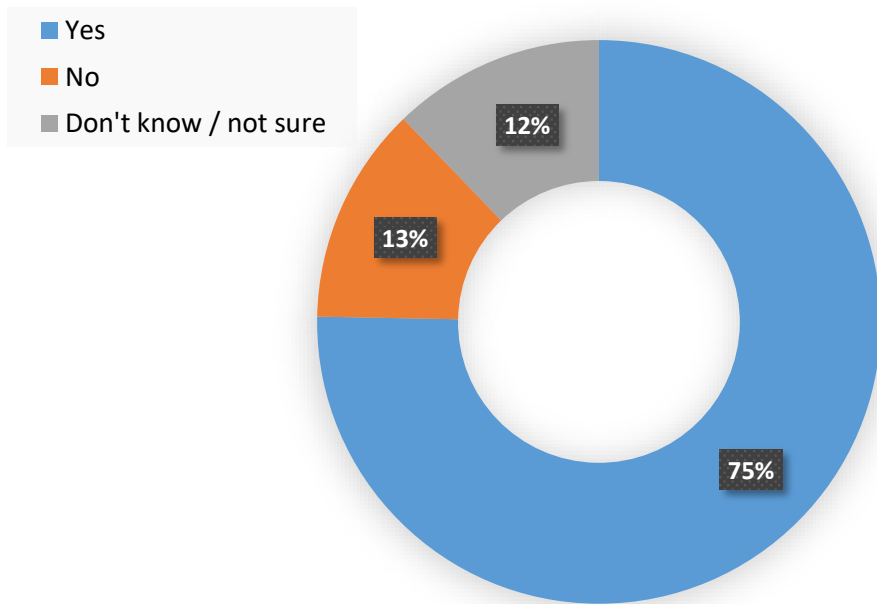
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Figure 20 What have been the main benefits of membership to the library for you personally since the COVID-19 lockdown?

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

In response to a question regarding personal benefits of the E-Library service during lockdown, survey participants identified that it overcame accessibility barriers associated with the pandemic (and for some mobility barriers which are part of an everyday lived experience), and that this was an important source of continuity, enjoyment and relief/relaxation.

"Feeling of options and connection with others and publications especially at that initial 'wow' lockdown shock."

"The library is something I value to access - being able to continue to access the library despite lockdown was a great relief"

"I'm in an essential industry and was working long hours. E books and audiobooks helped me relax and de-stress. This service was very important to me during the lockdown."

"I would not have any books or magazines to read if there was no E-Library, because of COVIDI do not go out as much."

"Being caught overseas at the beginning of COVID it was wonderful to have ready access to all material."

"Not having to drive to the library as I have a mobility problem"

"I have small children and if I had more personal time I would have used a lot more. I loved receiving updates from the library, especially during lockdown."

Suggested Improvements for the E-Library

E-Library users were asked how the E-Library service could be improved. And the most common response was increased content.

Another concern was the lack of licenses that were available for popular content and the waiting times that resulted. Some respondents also reported errors in the E-Library and App, difficulty navigating and searching, and frustration associated with multiple login processes for different areas, and some suggested a need for consolidation of platforms and/or global search functions.

"Hard to keep logging on to different apps to use different things, would be good to have one log on"

"Consolidation of titles into one app/platform?"

"A simple one stop easy to access portal and helpful staff to set it up"

"Wish can just use one app instead of need to download multiple app for the ebook"

"Condense the number of apps to have one with a wider range of texts. The registration process for each app could also be more simple."

"Providing access to audiobooks through one app rather than needing to down load several from the individual companies - I needed to down load three and one just will not work for me."

"There are too many readers but is this the publishers' fault rather than the Library's?"

"Logging in to all the different services can be a bit complicated. Also there doesn't seem to be a global catalogue search, so to see if you have a specific ebook I have to go into each ebook provider plus the main catalogue to check for it"

"Have all the E-Library resource links available on one page"

"The app and supplies don't intergrate member information"

"Not so many different apps"

"Onelogin to all apps or oneall inclusive app."

"Access to apps should be seamless."

"One single software rather than one for each publisher andore content (of course)"
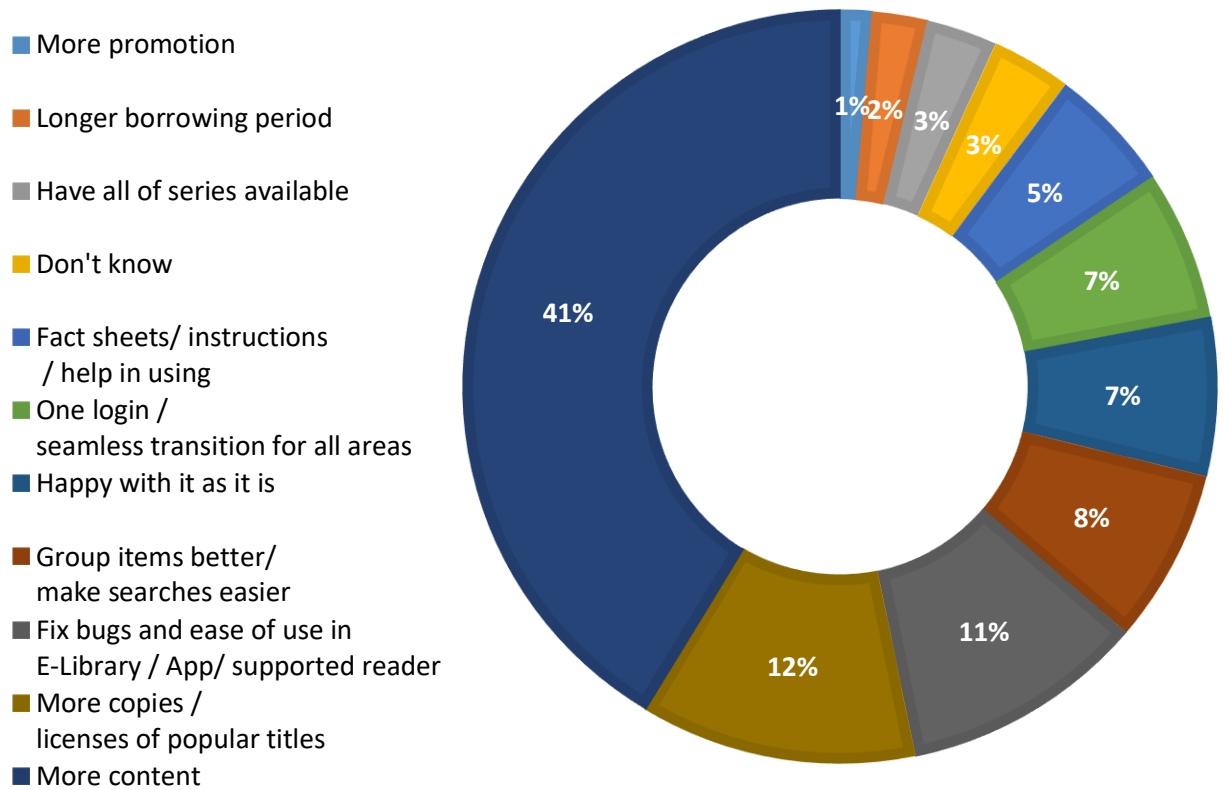
"I wish the magazines and books were in same app I forget them"

"Second copy of titles with long access waits. Not having to use numerous apps to search for specific titles / authors (catalogue searching is hit and miss)"

00"It would be handy if you could go to one site and see everything that is available rather than having to go to 2 or three. E.g. borrow box, RB digital, etc"

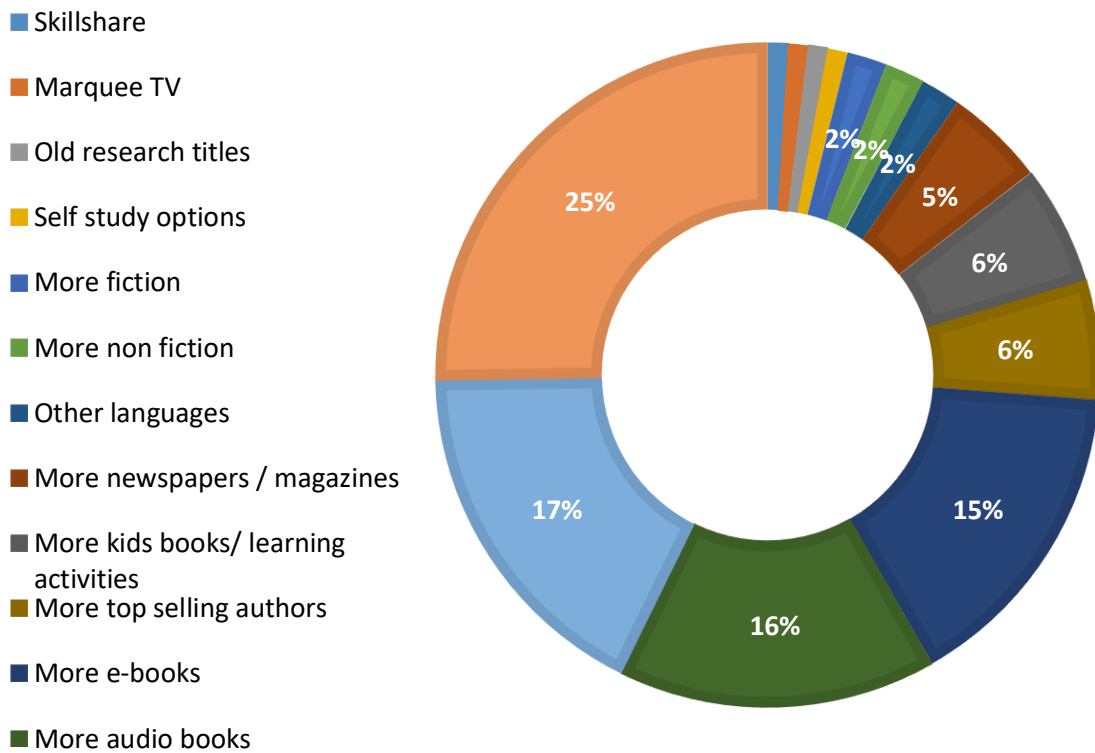*"More seamless integration across platforms, the app and the catalogue"*

Figure 21 How could the E-Library be improved?

- More promotion
- Longer borrowing period
- Have all of series available
- Don't know
- Fact sheets/ instructions / help in using
- One login / seamless transition for all areas
- Happy with it as it is
- Group items better/ make searches easier
- Fix bugs and ease of use in E-Library / App/ supported reader
- More copies / licenses of popular titles
- More content

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

The following graph provides a further breakdown of responses where E-Library users specified they would like more content. One in four respondents wanted greater variety, and one in six wanted more current titles, more audio books and more e-books.

Figure 22 Requested Content

- Skillshare
- Marquee TV
- Old research titles
- Self study options
- More fiction
- More non fiction
- Other languages
- More newspapers / magazines
- More kids books/ learning activities
- More top selling authors
- More e-books
- More audio books

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Almost two thirds (65%) of E-Library participants used the library App to access the E-Library. Over half (54%) of E-Library users who accessed via the App found it easy to use, and a further 33% found it relatively easy. The 7% of participants (n=16) who indicated that they found the App difficult or somewhat difficult to use, cited difficulty in searching and sorting, the use of many logins and the lack of intuitiveness as the reasons for this difficulty. Some mentioned that the website was easier to use than the App.

Figure 23 How easy did you find it to access the E-Library content via the App?
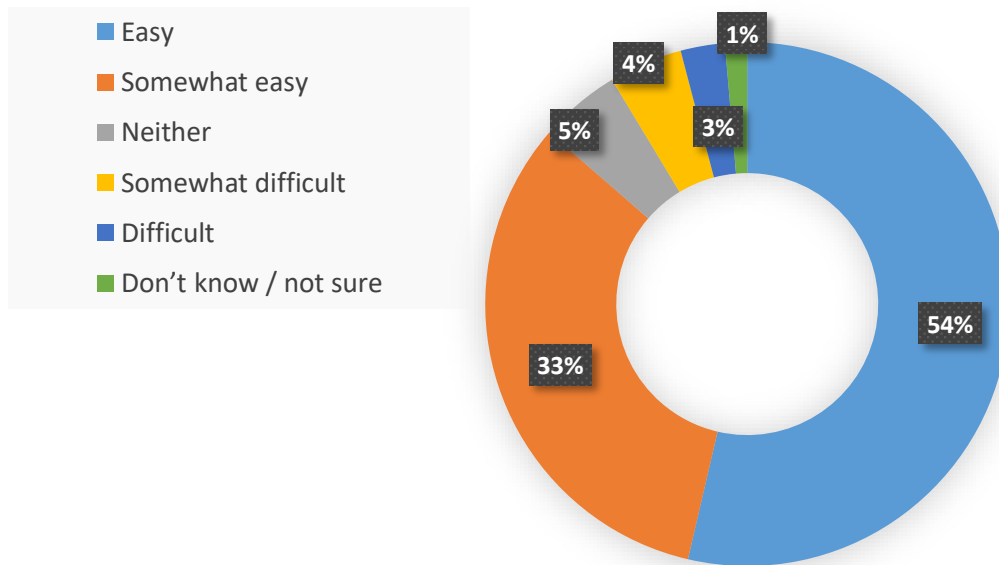
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Outcomes

Library App downloads and launches between January 2019 and December 2020 are shown in the graph below. The number of launches of the Library App have increased notably from late 2019, which precedes the onset of COVID. Launches increased by 18% from February to March, dropping sharply in April but picking up again in May and have experienced a steady incremental increase month on month since June to October 2020, where they have plateaued. The monthly number of Library App launches in December is slightly more than double the pre-COVID monthly average.

Library App downloads show considerable volatility over the two year period, with a pronounced peak in downloads in September of both 2019 and 2020. The 2020 September peak is double the 2019 peak however, and the average volume of App Downloads post-COVID is 138% higher or more than double the pre-COVID average.

Figure 24   Library Expansion, App Statistics
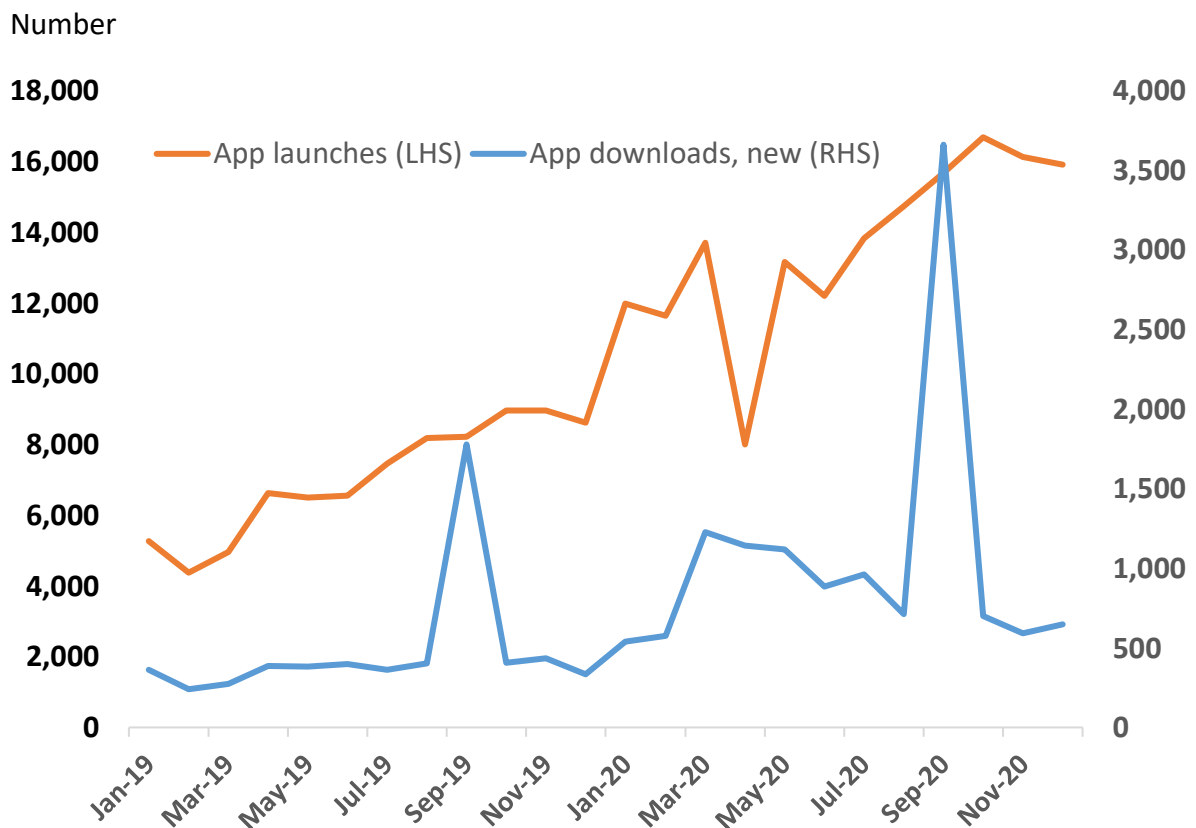
Source: City of Newcastle, E-Library Administrative Data Collection.

Looking at E-Audio, E-Book and E-Magazine loans from January 2019 to December 2020, there was a notable increase in electronic loans coinciding with the onset of COVID. E-book loans peaked in May 2020, when they had increased by 65 per cent since February. Similar there was a notable increases in the volume of loans in E-Audio (57% increase from February to a peak in April) and E-newspapers and magazines (a 41% increase from February to a peak in May). E-book, E-audio and E-Newspapers/magazines loans all dipped down to pre-COVID volumes in July, but the volume of loans picked up again in August/September. In December 2020 the volume of E-book, E-Audio and E-Newspapers/Magazines remained substantially above their average pre-COVID volumes. E-Book loans up 31%, E-Audio was up 53% and E-Newspapers/mags up 60% on the January 2019 to February 2019 average.

Figure 25   E-audio, E-book and E-Newspaper loans

Number
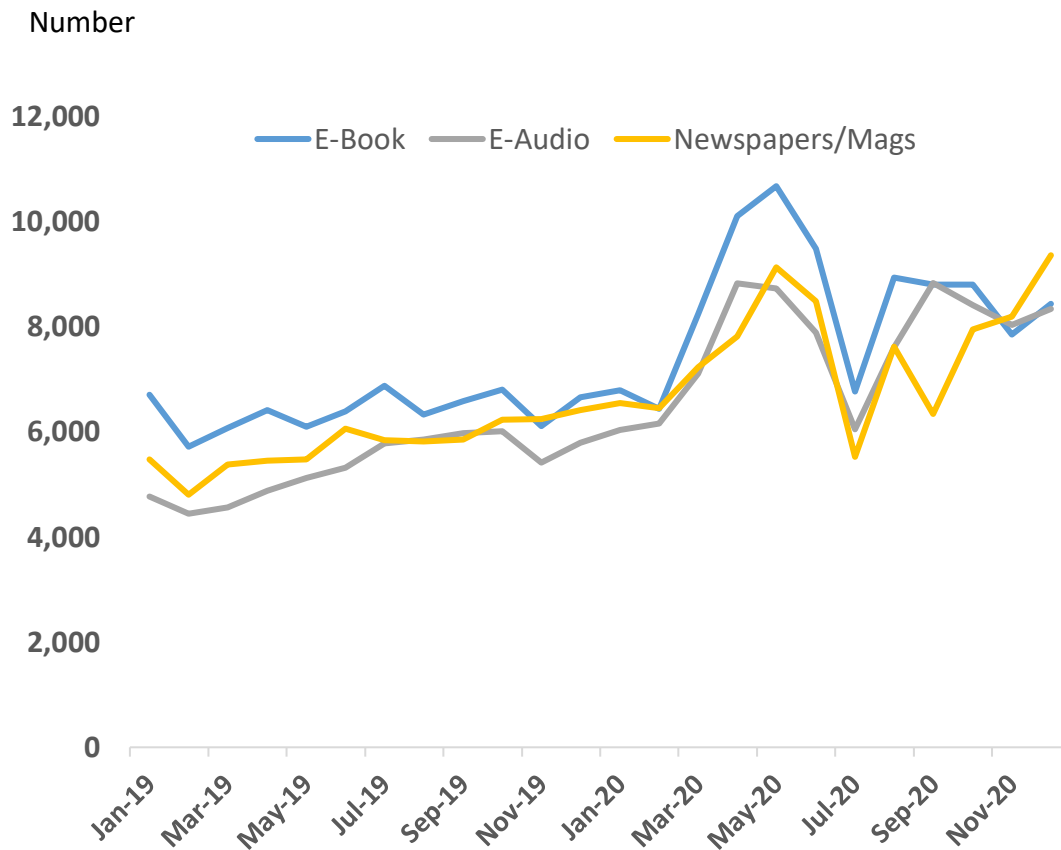
Source: City of Newcastle, E-Library Administrative Data Collection.

Although music, movie and downloads were fairly consistent from April to June 2020, downloads were in fact lower when comparing May 2019 to May 2020 (10,121 compared to 9,076). The reasons for this are unclear. The graph below suggests that loans of these items peaked during lockdown and have been declining since. A drop in music streamed through Freegal may be driving the overall drop, it is possible patrons are using other free services such as *Spotify* and *YouTube* particularly as they are increasingly integrated with smart home systems such as Google Home and Alexa,

Figure 26   Music, movie and video downloads
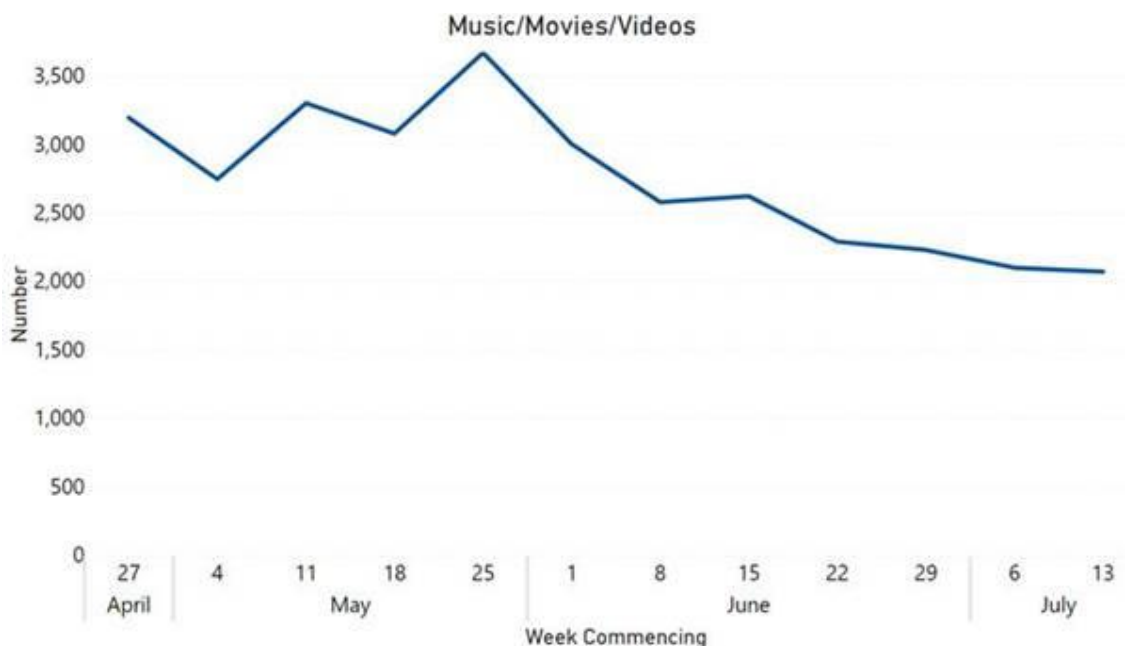
Source: City of Newcastle, E-Library Administrative Data Collection.

In terms of social media, there was a peak in Facebook live views and unique post engagements during June which coincides with mainstream and social media advertising of the e-library service that appeared during this period.

Figure 27   Facebook statistics
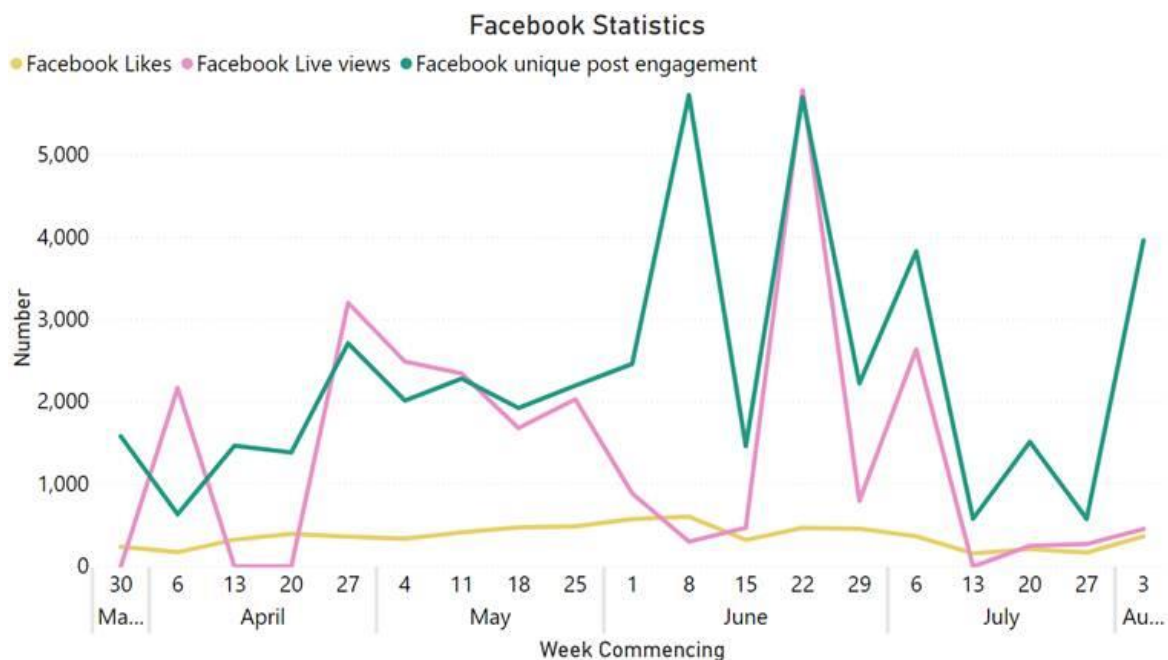
Source: City of Newcastle, E-Library Administrative Data Collection.

Interestingly, inbound calls related to the library services have increased markedly since the week commencing May 4th with a steep increase during the week of June 1st. The increase in calls may be related to the reopening of libraries that occurred from July 1st.

Figure 28   Incoming calls
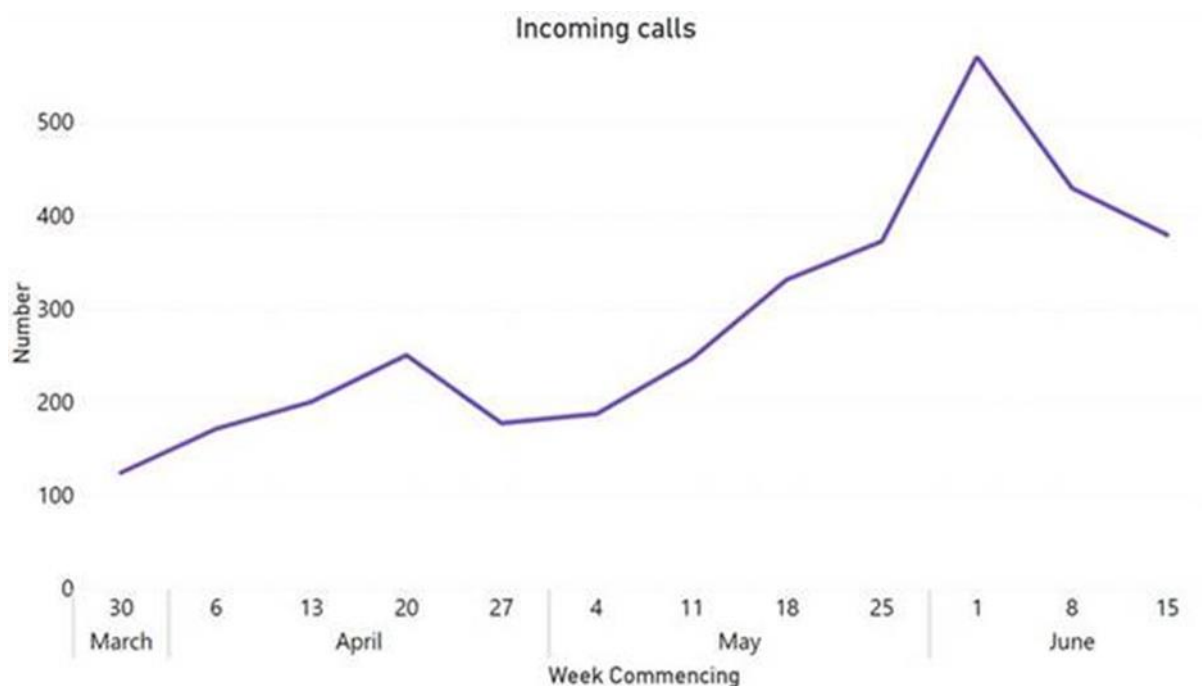
Source: City of Newcastle, E-Library Administrative Data Collection.

The following comments were made about the E-Library by Library members as part of outbound calls made by CN staff:

"The online Library has been my lifeline during this period."

"Thank you for keeping me entertained during COVID."

"Wow! I can't believe that you have all of this stuff [on the E-Library platform]. This is amazing"

"It's so great that Council has these resources. Keep up the good work!"

In summary, the data shows that since the library expansion the library has seen a steady increase in membership and substantial increases in library app usage, downloads and borrowing of E-material. Increased usage coincided with the most intense lockdown period in March-April, although increased use of electronic material appears to have been sustained to some degree post-lockdown, over 2020. There has also been increased social media coverage and positive sentiment associated with the E-Library service.

ONLINE LEARNING – STUDIOSITY AND LYNDA

Program description

This program involved promotion of CNs existing online training programs available to Library Members through Studiosity and Lynda. Using the expansion funding the number of minutes available for free one on one online tutoring support was increased in Studiosity. The aim of the Online Learning Program is to deliver on one of the core pillars of the Library Strategy – Lifelong Learning with benefits in terms of community wellbeing and opportunities for upskilling of the local population. A stated aspiration of the program is to help engender in the City of Newcastle, the most digitally literate small-business community in Australia.

Lynda is a leading online learning platform that provides training in business, software, technology and creative skills to achieve personal and professional goals. It is owned by LinkedIn. Lynda courses were curated to focus on strategic business development opportunities such as digital literacy for small business, online retail, digital marketing and business transformation.

Studiosity is on-demand study help service offering one-on-one tutoring support for school and tertiary students. This includes writing support and live assistance.

The cost of the expansion of the existing Studiosity and LinkedIn contract to CN was $60,000 that covered the cost of extending annual licence subscription for both Studiosity and Lynda.

Appropriateness

The provision of Studiosity and Lynda platforms free to the large Library membership base was appropriate given that these were pre-existing platforms with a history of success and capable of being rolled-out quickly. In addition, as online resources specifically designed to increase wellbeing and online learning and training opportunities for a broad range of businesses, they were ideally placed for funding as part of the COVID-19 response.

In delivering new modes of online learning for free these programs support several overarching aims of the resilience package: a) direct actions to support City of Newcastle community wellbeing b) timely responses that address cash-flow for small business and c) innovative programs that provide long-term strategic benefits for the city.

Implementation process

Both Lynda and Studiosity were available free to Library members prior to 2020 and the lockdown. Therefore, implementation was straightforward and mostly involved the renewal process.

A decision had been made prior to COVID to increase the Studiosity minutes available to users due to consistent levels of usage.

CN staff felt that the delay of the communications campaign to promote the entire Resilience Package was not ideal and that this likely negatively affected awareness and take-up of Studiosity and Lynda.

There was a "*Your Library at Home*" campaign run from 14th June to 26th July. During this campaign there was a focus on downloading the app and all the free content available including Lynda.

The promotion was run through MECCA and channels included:

- o Facebook advertising
- o Newcastle Herald online
- o HunterHunter
- o InTouch magazine and online
- o 2 NUR FM
- o GoogleAds

The City of Newcastle owned channels:

- o Website
- o eNews
- o City News
- o Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram
- o Billboard – Industrial Drive

Outcomes

Administrative data shows there was a sharp increase in the number of Lynda videos viewed between July 20 and August 3rd. It is unclear why such a dramatic increase occurred. The other peak in late May is likely associated with increased targeted promotion in mainstream and social media from May 21st. Figures are also substantially higher than when compared to views 12 months ago (six times higher than April 2019, twice as high as May 2019).
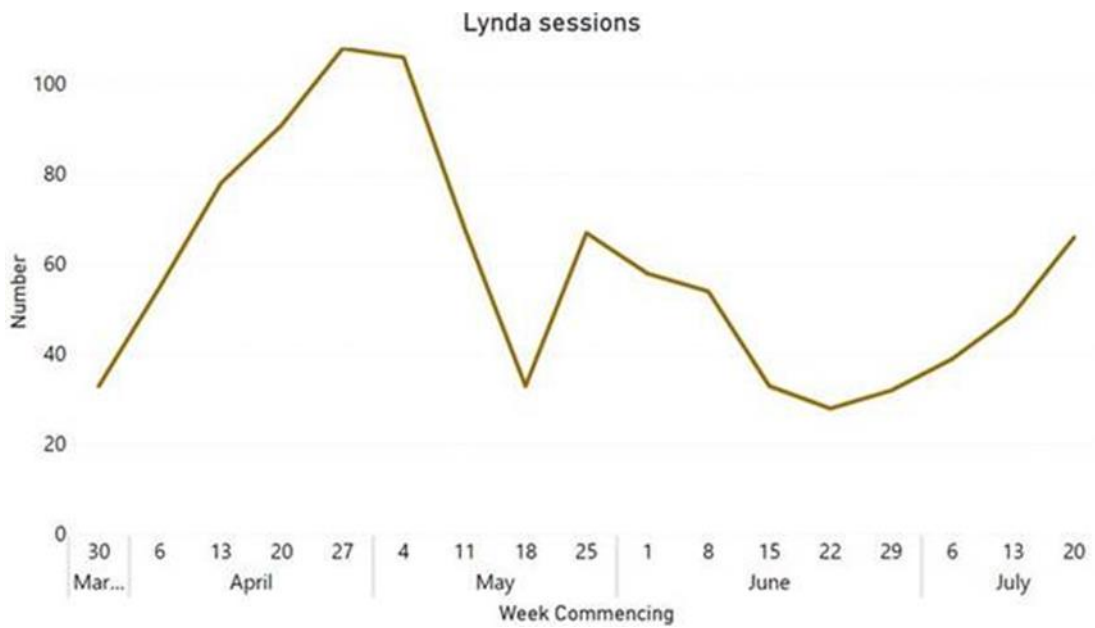
Figure 29   Lynda videos viewed
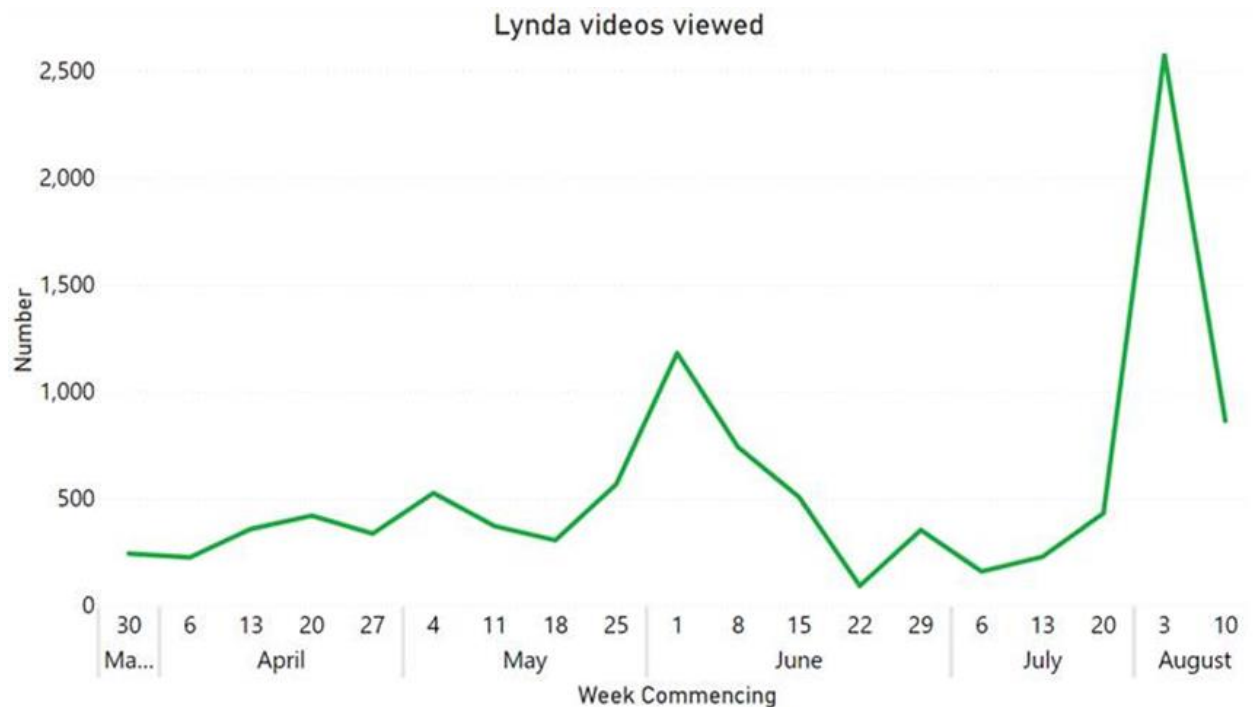
Source: City of Newcastle, E-Library Administrative Data Collection.

Completed Lynda sessions peaked between April 27 and May 4 as illustrated in the graph below. Interestingly, there has been an increase in the number of Lynda sessions since June 22. This again coincides with social media marketing.
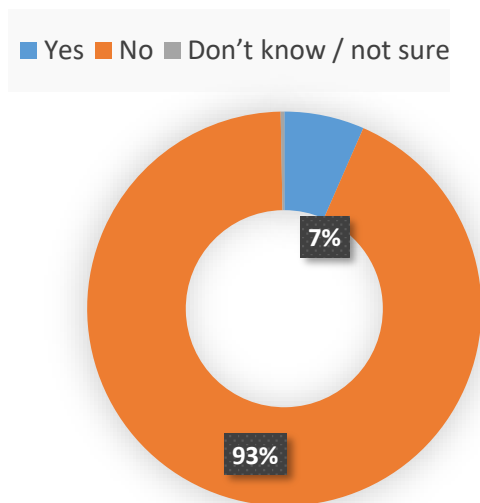
Figure 30   Lynda sessions

Source: City of Newcastle, E-Library Administrative Data Collection.

E-Library survey respondents were also asked if they had used Lynda and 93% had not. This may in part be explained by the skew towards older respondents in the sample.

Figure 31 Have you used Lynda?

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Of those respondents who had used Lynda 59% felt satisfied with the platform. The large range of topics and ease of navigation were noted as reasons for satisfaction. Only one person expressed dissatisfaction with Lynda and this was due to problems related to logging in to the platform. The small number of E-library survey participants who used Lynda mostly accessed to view training opportunities. Only four respondents completed training course through Lynda.

Figure 32 For those who had accessed Lynda during / after the COVID-19 lockdown - How satisfied were you with Lynda?
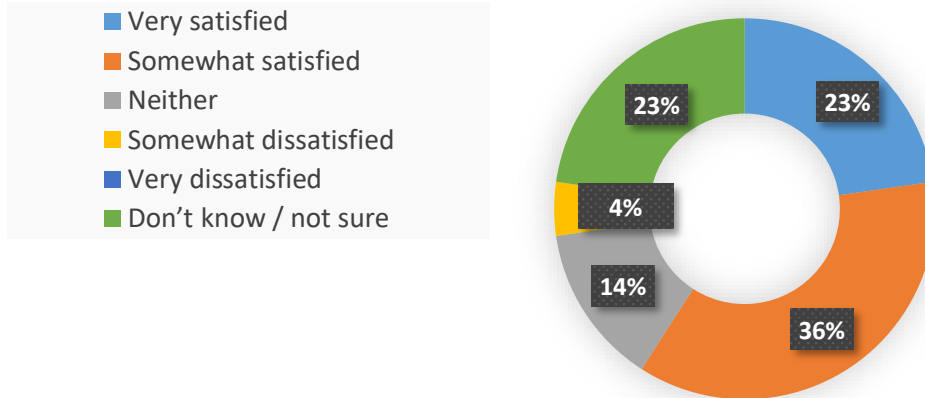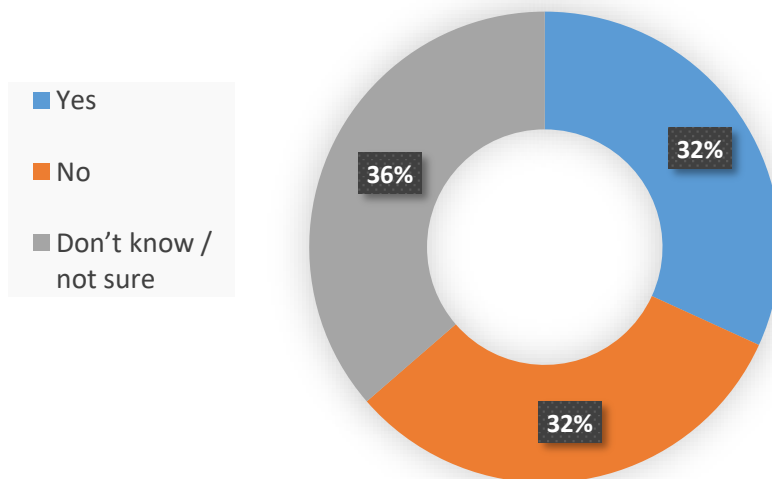

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Survey results for those who had used Lynda were evenly split across 'yes', 'no' and 'don't know' when asked if they had experienced benefits as a result of having used Lynda. For those who identified benefits, reasons cited included that it was something they could do from home, with their children, they learned something new or improved their skills. Positively, one participant reported that the training they undertook through Lynda led to them being able to generate an income.

> *"I have managed to further my skills to the extent to be able to use them to generate an income."*

Figure 33 For those who had accessed Lynda during / after the COVID-19 lockdown, have you experienced any benefits as a result of using Lynda?

Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

Using data available through the E-Library administrative collection, **Studiosity** usage did not show similar peaks to Lynda over April and May 2020, and was lower than 12 months ago. This may have been influenced by home schooling arrangements during the NSW lockdown period, which is supported by increased patterns of usage after the lockdown period. There have been peaks in usage in mid to late June and again in July that supports the theory that now that students are back in a school routine, Studiosity is being utilised more often. The most recent reporting of Studiosity minutes in August represents the highest figures for the year, which is very encouraging.

Figure 34   Studiosity statistics
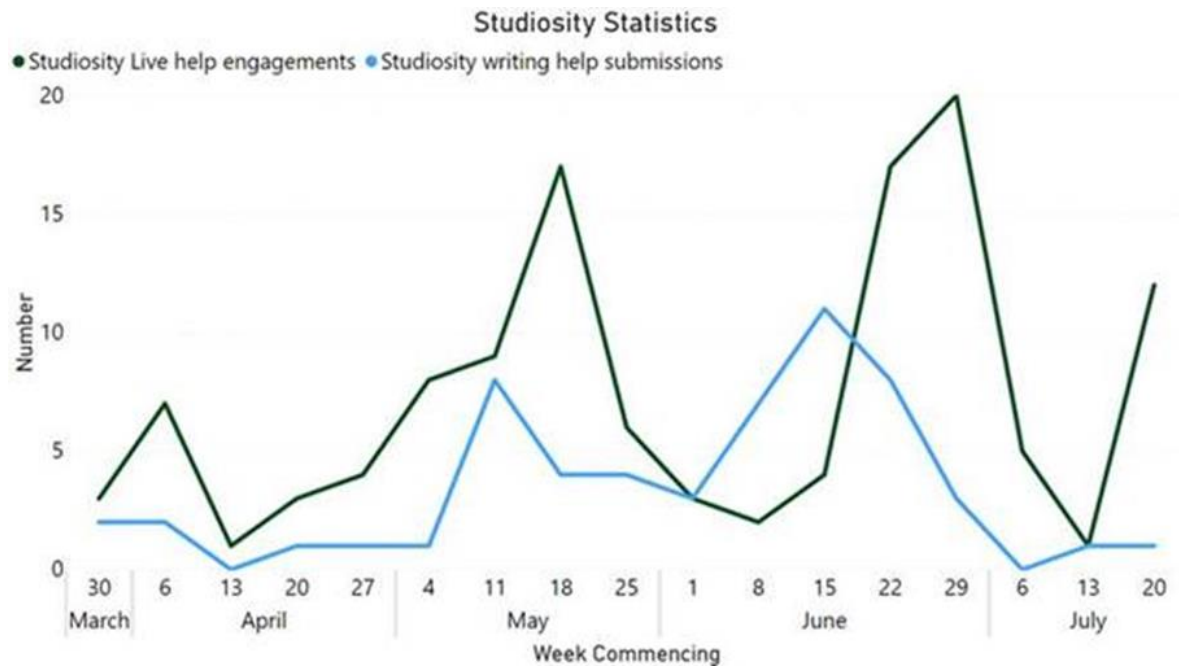
Source: City of Newcastle, E-Library Administrative Data Collection.

Figure 35   Studiosity minutes
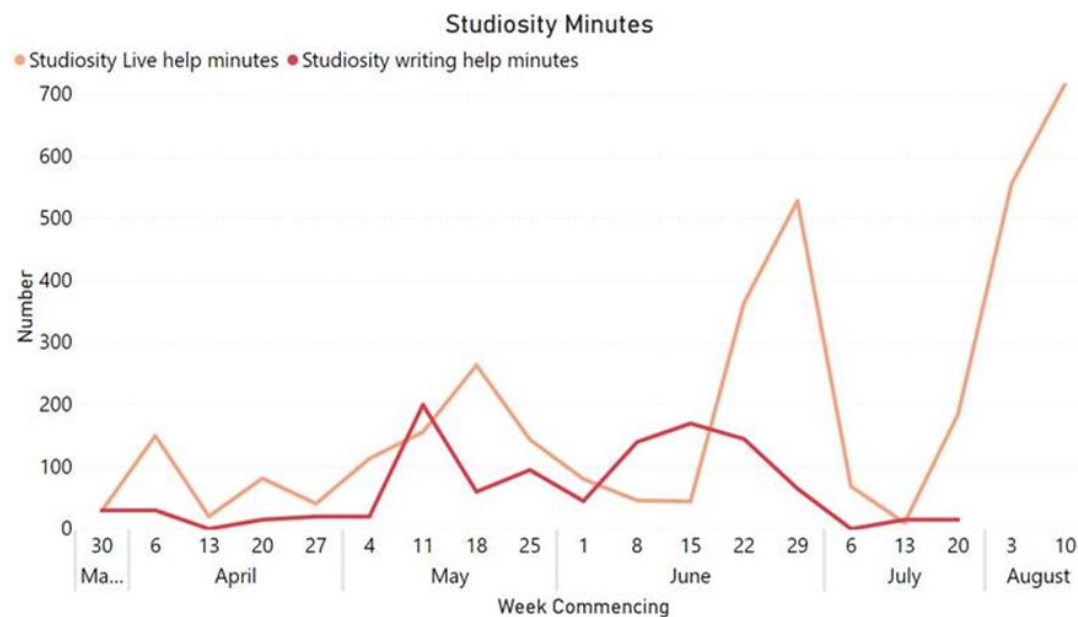
Source: City of Newcastle, E-Library Administrative Data Collection.

Table 4: Studiosity usage April / May 2019/20

Type	April 2019	April 2020	May 2019	May 2020
Writing help submissions	15	5	-	25
Live help submissions	4	18	71	25
TOTAL	**19**	**23**	**71**	**50**

Only five E-Library survey respondents had used Studiosity, which is not surprising given low levels of engagement with the platform by E-Library users as indicated in the program data above. Two of the five who had used Studiosity used it during the lockdown for writing submissions, two for assistance with study, one used it for their child's study, and one specified utilising it for quizzes. Three of the respondents were very satisfied - reporting their appreciation of the one on one support and enjoyment of the content. Two users were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, on the basis of not really knowing what they wanted and not being familiar with the program.

Figure 36   Have you used Studiosity?
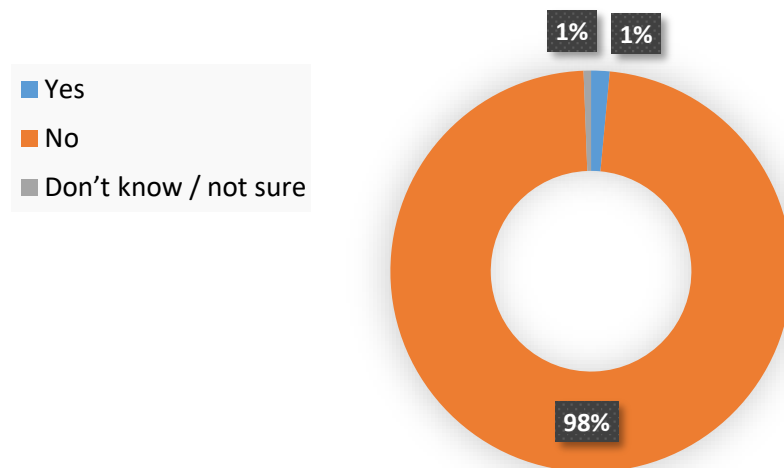
Source: COVID 19 Resilience Package E-Library Evaluation survey.

It is worth noting that recently, CN have conducted workshops in schools to promote the Studiosity platform.

In summary, Lynda performed very well with videos viewed doubling from May 2019 to May 2020. Videos viewed also doubled from May 2020 to June 2020. Studiosity did not see similar patterns of increased use, with figures down when compared to 2019. As already noted, this is likely to have been influenced by home schooling arrangements during the lockdown period.

COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAM – RAPID RESPONSE

Program description

The Community Grant Program was established to provide financial and in-kind support to mobilise assistance for non-government organisations, not-for-profits, charities and community groups to scale and respond to community need.

The first phase of the Program was the *Rapid Response Grant* program that was designed to free up early urgent funds for those in need. In total, $172,466 was committed as part of the *Rapid Response Grants* to seven local community organisations. Of this amount, $28,000 had been committed by 3rd April, with the remainder allocated by 17th April.

Appropriateness

The overarching aim of the program was to assist organisations servicing the most vulnerable community members, during a period of increased need as associated with the COVID pandemic. It strongly aligns with a key resilience package aim to provide direct actions to support City of Newcastle community wellbeing.

The program was developed with an evidence base that included a literature review to inform the understanding and definition of vulnerable groups. At-risk vulnerable groups included Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, newly arrived migrants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people with a disability, people experiencing economic disadvantage, those with poor physical or mental health, carers, people in single parent/grandparent families, youth, those aged over 50, family groups experiencing financial hardship, victims of domestic violence and those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Prior to lockdown in NSW, the CN Community Planning team actively engaged with the community and NfP sector via email and phone. The aim was to gauge the pressures facing this sector in order to assist with planning CN's response. Organisations were informed at this stage about the potential opportunities to be offered through the grant programs (*Rapid Response and Boost Our City*). This process was important for the Community Planning team, as it enabled a current assessment of the potential impact to the community sector which assisted identifying the most at-risk vulnerable groups in Newcastle.

Implementation process

The overarching aim of the *Rapid Response* program was to assist organisations servicing the most vulnerable community members, as efficiently as possible. Timing was critical to ensure that those in need had access to essential items (namely food) immediately. For example, in some cases, recipients received funding one week after submission of their application. In order to achieve this, adherence to usual protocol was not possible. For example, the governance structure of the *Rapid Response* was more fluid than would usually be expected with a grant program, and an acquittal process was not necessary.

> *"In hindsight there wasn't a governance structure [for Rapid Response] and that doesn't sit well with government, even though a paper trail exists. An enquiry came in, we spoke to them and if the funded activity had merit we supported them, knowing there was a more formal program on the way. It was very unlike us (CN) to work that way but they were exceptional times."* (*Program Manager*)

The speed at which this program was mobilised internally in response to community need is impressive. As a community grant program had not been operational at CN for a number of

years', it was not possible to simply replicate an existing program. It was clear from speaking to the *Program Manager* that there was a level of discomfort internally within CN in deviating from usual practice. In a time of such uncertainty, CN demonstrated leadership, quick thinking and immediate support to the community sector, which undoubtedly had flow on effects for the broader community, especially the most vulnerable.

In terms of lessons learnt, the Program Manager noted that some of the *Rapid Response* recipients would have been better suited to be included in the *Boost Our Community* Grant Program, indicating that their need was less urgent when compared to others. The Program Manager also noted that in hindsight, specifications could have been made that required funding to be tied to food-related responses. However, assessing applicants collectively was not possible as the *Rapid Response* was a rolling and immediate grant program.

Outcomes

The following table summarises the organisations and projects that were funded as part of the *Rapid Response Grant* program.

Table 5: Rapid Response Grant Recipients

Organisation	Funded activity	Funded amount
OzHarvest - a leading food rescue organisation that collects excess food from commercial outlets which is then provided to over 1,300 charities supporting people in need across the country.	Support for food rescue and delivery program in Newcastle LGA (COVID-19 Food Relief Crisis Support)	$22,627
Soul Café – Provides meals to disadvantaged Novocastrians. They also provide pathways to services for vulnerable community members including drug, alcohol and substance abuse support, accommodation links, Centrelink referral, counselling services, legal aid and health services.	Food supply	$30,000
Grainery Church (and Café) – Church located in Mayfield West that provides free and low cost meals to people in need.	Upgrade kitchen and food supply – scale of packed food provision.	$13,696
Got Your Back Sista – A charity that offers benevolent relief and support to women and children escaping domestic violence and are at risk of living below the poverty line.	Phone counselling	$2,200
Justiz Community – A social justice agency that aims to raise awareness and provide local relevant services.	Food supply and essential care packages.	$6,000
Awabakal – An organisation that provides primary health care, aged care, children and family services to Aboriginal people living in Newcastle, Lake Macquarie Port Stephens and the Hunter Valley.	Prepared food for Elders.	$30,000
Baptist Care Hopestreet – assistance to disadvantaged communities through arrange of services including employment, problem gambling, domestic violence, homelessness, food and financial assistance.	Food supply and distribution.	$25,000

Warlga Ngurra Women and Children Refuge – an Aboriginal support services for women and children escaping domestic violence.	Technical equipment for children schooling whilst in refuge.	$30,000

As indicated in the table above, the majority of activities funded as part of the *Rapid Response* program were food related. This demonstrates the importance of the responsiveness of the program to meet essential needs for vulnerable groups.

Qualitative feedback

Interviews were conducted with two organisations that received funding as part of the *Rapid Response* program – The Grainery Church and Café and Justiz Community. The following section details the feedback gathered from representatives of these organisations.

Grainery Care (Church and Café)

Located in Mayfield, the Grainery Church provides outreach into the community to those in need emotionally, spiritually and physically and provide early intervention support. They also provide a food ministry to the community which consists of free and low costs meals to community members in need.

Grainery Care's client base shifted as a result of the impacts of the pandemic. Pre-COVID their client group tended to be marginalised members of the community and these experiencing person hardship and poverty. Since the impacts of COVID-19 Grainery Care were servicing a much broader segment of the community, particularly with regard to the elderly, parents and those recently made redundant.

The *Rapid Response* application process was viewed favourably by the representative from Grainery Care. Initial research was undertaken to determine what funding may be available during the early stages of COVID. Evidence was found of a zoom meeting held by CN with representatives of the NfP sector. The representative immediately called the City of Newcastle and spoke directly to the Program Manager who requested a short EOI be developed by Grainery Care.

> *"The application process was wonderful. There was about one tenth of the paperwork that is usually required for a grant application. I also felt that there was a lot of trust. We were notified by phone that we were successful and that the funding would be available in a week."*

The EOI was accepted and the following activities were funded:
- The food store for two additional days per week for 10 weeks (allowing the store to be open for five days a week); and
- Purchase of a freezer, fridge and shelf storage for food.

When discussing the **strengths** of the program, the following were identified:
- The application process was uncomplicated and rapid;
- Staff were considered very responsive and open to discussion. For example, the representative called CN staff to discuss a proposal for a shared refrigerator truck that could service multiple charities across the Hunter. Even though the proposed activity did not go ahead, the ability to discuss with a staff member was greatly appreciated;
- The ability to speak to someone of authority from CN, rather than filling in a form: *"In a time of crisis, it is of real comfort to speak to someone who says they will get back to you tomorrow, rather than filling in a form."*

In terms of outcomes of the program for Grainery Care, the funding has meant increased capacity for Grainery care in terms of ability to serve a greater number of clients, and increased food production and storage. It is estimated that demand for meals provided by Grainery Care increased from the provision of meals for 50 people a week pre-COVID-19 to 500 during the pandemic.

> *"[The program has had an] extraordinarily huge impact. It increased our capacity for storage by 200%. The new freezer that we bought is a high quality snap freezer so that has increased our food safety practices. We now have a much larger capacity to serve the community – we can produce and store more".*

The program was also felt to have increased the wellbeing of clients, as it demonstrated that the City of Newcastle takes care of its vulnerable community members. This was perceived to have had a positive effect on increased sense of community:

> *"The message through the funding was that Newy is doing what Newy does best – looking after each other when times are tough. It's inspiring for people to know that the community looks after each other."*

In terms of other feedback, the representative noted the limitation that recipients needed to be based in the Newcastle LGA to be eligible. It was felt that this raised challenges for many NfPs that have a network of offices and providers based throughout the Hunter region:

> *"Our client base is across the Hunter. How do we get above these imaginary borders [LGAs] and look at what the function and need is, not what the postcode is. There is a missed opportunity as most charities work across the region and are not delineated by postcode."*

Justiz Community
Justiz Community is a social justice agency that aims to raise awareness and provide local relevant services. In recent years they have focused on the provision of a range of services, including social groups and outreach, to clients with a disability.

Justiz Community's clients were hit particularly hard by the pandemic as many found themselves extremely isolated due to limited mobility, limited capacity for self-care and disruption of services. This also intensified mental health complexities as experienced by some of their clients.

Due to reduced service demand, the organisation also had to cut the hours of many of their casual staff.

The Justiz Community was initially called by a staff member at CN who outlined that the Council would be developing a grant program to assist vulnerable community members affected by COVID-19. The organisation participated in an information session held by CN (via zoom) that aimed to provide information about the program.

The application process and responsiveness were positively received:

> *"[The application was process was] easy and straight to the point. We really appreciated that because we were so busy trying to keep everything going here. It was so good that it was not a drawn out process that took up a lot of our time."*

Justiz Community received funding for two main elements including:

- Provision of supplies to make healthy meals for clients. This was a new service provided by the organisation: *"The clients are loving it"*
- Care packages for clients that included sanitary and self-care items. The packages became particularly important as during lockdown some clients were experiencing difficulty obtaining items (such as toilet paper).

To demonstrate the speed of the application timeline, the representative noted that there was two weeks in between the initial information session with CN, approval and receiving funds.

> *"The funding went through immediately – it was incredible! Fastest funding I have ever applied for."*

In terms of outcomes of the program for Justiz Community, the funding allowed an internal program developed in response to COVID (provision of meals and care packages). It was felt that this has led to improved health and wellbeing outcomes for clients, particularly with regard to positive impacts on mental health:

> *"It's had a very positive impact for our clients. It has given them something to look forward to - the deliveries – they loved it! Not sure how we're going to stop doing it now. There has also been an increased connection and relationships between clients and staff members. For clients, the knowledge that people were taking the time and effort to cook them healthy meals and care for them has been a real comfort."*

Staff at CN were also praised for their helpfulness, excellent communication and support:

> *"It's really nice to know that the Council is there to support and care for our community in a crisis."*

Broader outcomes for CN

A range of outcomes for CN staff were identified as a result of the implementation of the *Rapid Response* program. These included:

- Upskilling staff and reconnection to sector – As a community grant program had not been in place for several years at CN, the team was required to come up to speed very quickly. This included knowledge of the community / NfP landscape in Newcastle and changes to the categorisation of NfPs.
- Development and management of a program in a crisis situation – on a personal and team level experience has been gained of how to navigate a national crisis in a city context.
- Team building – the Community Planning team were required to work in new ways in a time sensitive manner and under considerable pressure. This is likely to have fostered a resilience in the team when faced with challenges in the future.
- Goodwill generated in the NfP sector – *"It's evident that organisations have been very grateful and really impressed with Council through this process."*

COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAM – BOOST OUR CITY

Program description

The second stage of funding through the Grant program was through the *Boost Our City* Community Sector Grants. The aim of the grant program is to:

> *"… assist with immediate response to COVID-19 related challenges focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable and emerging at-risk members of our community. The grant is open to community sector groups: not-for-profits, non-government organisations, for profit service providers and charities that directly support the health and wellbeing of the community".* (*Grant Guidelines*)

The program aims to assist existing services providers with increased demand in areas such as:

- Provision of support services;
- Supported living;
- Food;
- Crisis support;
- Welfare;
- Material assistance;
- Community transport;
- Rapid adaption for community to keep connected via online communication;
- Collaboration with other organisations; and
- Innovative, creative solutions which will make a positive impact to the community.

Unlike the *Rapid Response*, a formal acquittal process has been put in place for the *Boost Our City* Grants.

Appropriateness

The design of the *Boost Our City* Grant Program was informed through the experience of creating and managing the Rapid Response program. The ability to learn from the earlier program was beneficial as for all intents and purposes the *Boost Our City* Grant was a more formalised and structured version of the *Rapid Response* program. In addition, the groundwork laid in understanding the NfP landscape (i.e. the breadth of NfPs and charities working in Newcastle) and community need (segments most affected) was utilised in the development of the *Boost Our City* Grant Program.

The Grant Program eligibility criteria specified that applicants must be locally based, service the Newcastle LGA community and comply with the community values as defined in the Newcastle 2030 Community Strategic Plan.

Implementation process

As previously mentioned, as CN did not have a grant program in place at the time of the pandemic, staff covered considerable ground in short space of time in order to commence the program. Guidelines were developed as new, using similar guidelines from other CN programs were innovatively modified.

In addition, the team had limited experience using the grants administration system SmartyGrants, and it was felt that this had time and efficiency implications that slowed the approval process. This issue has now been remedied as a Grants Officer has been employed within the team.

One other issue identified by the Program Manager was that the application process may have been complicated by the stipulation that applicants needed to demonstrate '*the degree to which goods and services, including employment, is procured locally'*. The Program Manager felt that

while this may have caused some consternation for applicants, encouraging the use of local resources was a key platform of CN's COVID-19 response.

Outcomes

Thirty-two applications were approved with a total funding amount of $512,172. An additional 35 applications were received but were declined. Unsuccessful applicants were notified of opportunities to link in with relevant programs such as 'Lean-in Newy'. However, to date, take-up of opportunities with this platform have been limited.

Key activities that were funded included:

- scale/pivot for food preparation and distribution;
- care packs, such as essential grocery items for vulnerable or isolated people;
- technology assistance for vulnerable communities to connect to support or education services (i.e. hardware and internet); and
- increased counselling/case management/support.

Analysis of the approved applicants indicates a broad spread of funded activities, with many activities addressing multiple needs in the community. Community needs addressed by successful applicants included (in order of frequency):

- Mental health and wellbeing (24);
- Food and essential supplies (16);
- Addressing social isolation (16);
- Crisis support (13);
- Service continuity (12);
- Technology: ready and connected (12);
- DV (9);
- Volunteers: ready and active (6);
- Physical ability and mobility (4); and
- Engaged learning (4).

Interviews with Boost Our City Grant Recipients

Interviews were conducted with four (4) Boost Our City Grant recipients including representatives from Meals on Wheels, Hunter Multicultural Communities, Financial Counselling Hunter Valley Project and Hunter Community Legal Centre. The impacts of COVID-19 were experienced by these organisations in a range of ways, including:

- Increased need from vulnerable clients, particularly the elderly, who were experiencing social isolation and difficulty accessing essential items;
- Technical equipment shortages to allow staff to work remotely;
- Changes to volunteering availability. This was most relevant to Meals on Wheels, where the majority of volunteers are aged over 65 and were therefore considered high risk.
- Operational changes to the way services were provided. For example, Hunter Multicultural Communities pivoted from providing weekly meals at social groups to daily in-person contact and meals to extremely vulnerable and isolated clients.

Application process

It was consistently noted that the application process was streamlined and uncomplicated. This was a great relief to recipients as they were under additional pressure as a result of the pandemic due to operational changes and increased need as experienced by vulnerable clients.

"The application process was very smooth and Council staff were very helpful with enquiries."

"It was the best application process – super easy, super simple and I was notified really quickly."

All recipients consulted noted that the timeframe between lodging the application and receiving funds was also very fast, often a period of weeks. This was considered to be exceptionally swift when compared to other grant application timeframes. The immediacy of funding availability meant that organisations could mobilise the deployment of resources more quickly and this provided palpable relief to staff:

"It was the quickest turnaround I've ever experienced for a grant. It was very satisfying to write the application and receive a response straight away. It meant we could access modern equipment for staff quickly and the grant process didn't slow us down."

"I couldn't believe that Council got back to us so quickly! We needed the funds badly."

Staff were also consistently noted as helpful and responsive, which was highly appreciated given competing priorities at the time:

"If I had an enquiry staff would usually get back to me within the hour."

"We didn't need to have much contact with [CN] staff. It was such a hectic time and people were flailing, so it was helpful that the process was so streamlined."

The recipients consulted had not undertaken the acquittal process at the time of writing, so assessment of this element did not take place.

Impacts for organisation and clients

The following impacts for organisations and the clients were identified as direct result of the program:

- Immediate access to materials and equipment due to the response time from CN and reception of funding;
- Increased morale for staff. For example, Meals on Wheels were able to purchase a new plating system with the funding which positively affected staff morale during a stressful time: *"As soon as the machine arrived you could see a difference in staff. Spirits were lifted. Finally here was some investment to help them do their work."*
- Increased social and emotional wellbeing for clients as organisations were able to pivot their service offering. For example, Hunter Multicultural Communities modified their service to include daily in-person visits to isolated and vulnerable community members: *"It gave clients a lot more assurance that they weren't going to be left alone and that someone cared."*

Overall assessment

One of the major strengths of the program was that it was perceived to send a message to the Newcastle community that Council cares about supporting its vulnerable community members:

"It sends a message to the community that Council cares about members of the community that need to be taken care of. The program has helped to keep our clients healthy and alive."

"This program has assisted services to continue to support Newcastle's vulnerable community members."

This was particularly important given the difficult circumstances that organisations were faced with in terms of increased client needs and operational changes.

"It was great that the assistance was available so early. There was so much uncertainty at that time."

Other strengths of the program that were identified included the streamlined application process, fast notification and reception of funds and staff responsiveness.

As part of initial consultation conducted by HRFC, the Program Manager noted a number of measures of success of the program. These have been assessed in the table below.

Table 6   Assessment Against Measures of Success

Measure of success	Outcome
Expending funds allocated to the program	Achieved.
Increased knowledge for the Not-for-Profit sector of how to structure programs for vulnerable communities that meet Council criteria / in a crisis	From the sample that HRFC engaged with, this was achieved successfully. Organisations were able to pivot their service offering for clients within the confines of COVID operational impacts. Further Evidence of this is the number of organisations that were successful in their application.
Positive impacts of programs to vulnerable community members, including increased wellbeing impacts for program participants	The grant recipients consulted as part of this evaluation reported positive impacts to vulnerable clients, including increased social interaction and emotional wellbeing during and after lockdown.
Good news stories	Achieved. All of the grant recipients consulted as part of this evaluation could potentially be contacted to share their stories.

'LEAN-IN NEWY' APP

Program description

'Lean-In Newy' is a social action and economic incentive app developed in partnership with GreenBe that utilises a digital solution to nudge, engage and propel local behaviour. Users are encouraged to undertake a range of challenges in order to accrue points. Points can then be redeemed for vouchers at participating Newcastle businesses. To date there have been 88 challenges launched that encourage acts to support local business, volunteering and community connectedness. In total, 29 businesses have signed up to take part in the rewards / redemptions with 60 rewards on offer. The app was launched during the first week of June and its design is the first of its kind to be delivered by an Australia city.

The aim is to stimulate acts of good will in the community, reward community members for their action and support small business through the redemption of rewards.

"We saw it as a small business economic stimulus but one that has a great return on investment for Council as it doubled its value because it required the community to match dollars and invest socially. It's also a two-sided platform with community groups who need assistance and community members who are looking to help. This was a totally unique design."

Challenges are delivered through five key categories:
- **Ready to Help:** a series of enabling challenges. Once you complete this section, you'll access more challenges;
- **Pitch In**: challenges structured around supporting the broader community, such as formal volunteering opportunities with pre-vetted community groups, not-for-profits and NGOs;
- **Help Out**: challenges aimed at encouraging people to provide assistance to those in need within their local neighbourhoods;
- **Stay Connected:** challenges that are designed to encourage and nurture community interaction, creativity and wellbeing; and
- **Shop Local**: challenges that incentivise participants to support their local small businesses.

A CN working group meets regularly to develop challenges and target businesses and community groups. GreenBe is responsible for the recruiting businesses to participate in the program. In addition, community groups have been invited to collaborate with CN in addressing identified needs that they may have that can then be translated into challenges on the app. This will provide an ongoing vehicle of engagement between the community and community organisations. This will ensure that the legacy of the app will continue as it is envisaged that it will pivot from a crisis response tool to a vehicle to promote long term city-wide contribution. To this end, interest has already been shown from businesses and organisations in Newcastle who are interested in using the app to promote events.

Appropriateness

The Lean in Newy platform and app was developed by the City of Newcastle in order to deliver the Council's resident and business programs 'virtually' in order to encourage ongoing civic participation, volunteering and engagement in a new COVID environment.

Initially, the concept was developed as a way to connect volunteers from the community with local charities in a way that was not onerous for charities, many of whom were experiencing increased demand at the outset of the pandemic. An induction program for volunteering was

developed as the first platform with the aim of enabling community members to be pre-eligible for volunteering services.

The platform allows Council to deliver digital programs, alerts, health and wellbeing advice and other city 'challenges' to residents instantly while recognising residents participating in their civic duties and rewarding them with Lean-in Newy points and rewards.

The app covers off on three key overarching aims of the package:
- Direct actions to support City of Newcastle community wellbeing;
- Timely responses that address cash-flow for small business; and
- Innovative programs that provide long-term strategic benefits for the city.

Implementation phase

The original timeframe agreement with GreenBe included a request from CN for an expedited delivery timeframe from eight to two weeks. A CN spokesperson noted that this was a condensed timeframe that required months of work to be undertaken in a number of weeks.

Unfortunately there were some technical difficulties that delayed the launch of the app which meant that it was not operational until after the lockdown period had ended and ten days after the original launch date. This appears to be a missed opportunity as the lockdown period may have offered increased take-up due to a captive audience. However, it is acknowledged that as a new platform with new technology, the implementation period was likely to be lengthier than expected.

Outcomes

To date, 2,368 users have joined the initiative as subscribers at the time of writing. CN's original target were 2,000 subscribers by the end of September 2020 (achieved) and 10,000 by June 2021. It is worth noting that feedback from GreenBe indicates that take-up has been strong and early when compared to some of the other platforms they have designed for other clients, including local governments. The following graph shows downloads over time and indicates that take-up was strongest between early June and early July but has kept a steady trajectory to November 2020.

Figure 37   Lean-In Newy App Downloads

Lean-in Newy app downloads
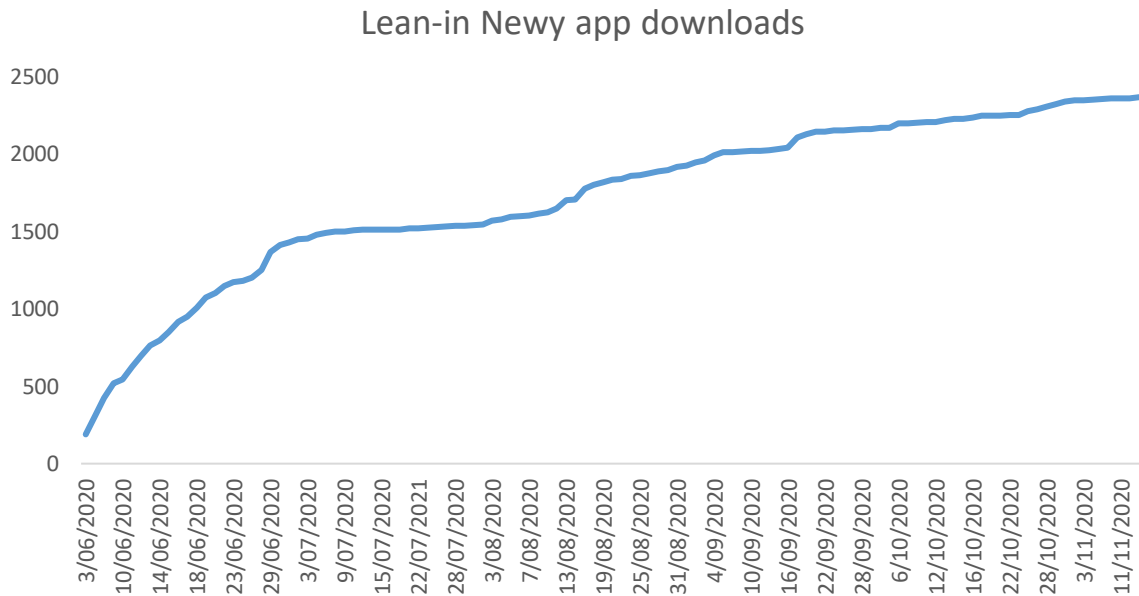
Source: GreenBe

Females are more likely to be subscribers in the initiative than males (74% compared to 26% respectively). Participants also tended to be aged between 26 and 55, with the greatest usage amongst those aged 26-35 years, as demonstrated in the below graph below. A CN spokesperson noted that representation from these age groups was positive, as they tended to be a hard-to-reach cohort.

Figure 38   Age of Lean-In Newy Users

Age
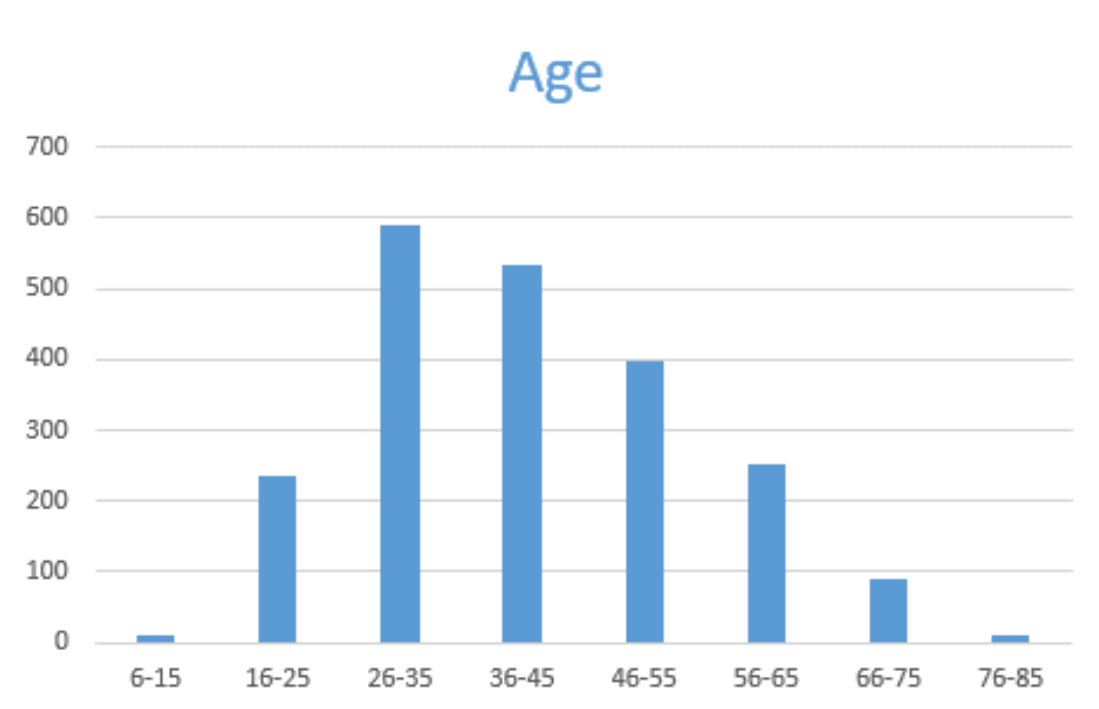
So far, the top ten challenges are mostly passive challenges (i.e. downloaded the City of Newcastle app or viewing a volunteering procedures video). This suggests that users are finding it somewhat difficult or onerous to complete challenges requiring more effort. The top ten completed challenges, including the number of participants are:

- Download the 'City of Newcastle' app (630)
- Volunteer basics video (316)
- Get the flu vax (259)
- Volunteer policy and procedures video 1 (222)
- Take the 2 minute feedback survey (213)
- Buy local produce (206)
- Volunteer policy and procedures 2 (184)
- COVID-safe video (179)
- Volunteer work health and safety video 1 (159)
- Introduction to challenges video (146)

A survey was conducted with 97 users of the app with the following findings:

- When asked about the extent to which the app had given them ideas for how to help their community 21% answered 'a lot' and 63% answered 'a little';
- When asked about the extent to which the app has encouraged them to do more in their community, 24% answered 'a lot' and 57% answered 'a little';
- The top three motivations to complete challenges were: Learn more about how to help our community (52%), getting discounts (19%) and collecting points (15%). This finding is important and suggests that altruism is a greater motivator for users than redeeming rewards;
- When asked about barriers to completing challenges 27% said they forget they are completing the challenge and 22% felt that there are too many steps;
- When asked about likelihood of redeeming a reward 36% were extremely likely, 33% were somewhat likely and 27% were very likely;
- When asked about barriers to redeeming rewards 32% felt that there were no rewards of interest, 19% felt that the points were too high to redeem, 18% felt the minimum spend was too high, 16% felt that getting into town was too hard and 12% felt that they could not afford to spend that much. In response to this feedback CN and GreenBe are implementing a number of initiatives including strategies designed to increase the number of businesses participating and adjusting minimum spend amounts;
- In terms of rewards that respondents would like to see more of, the top two answers were more gift cards (26%) and donations to charity (26%);
- When asked how respondents became aware of the app 31% had heard about it through word-of-mouth, 17% through the Council Facebook page, 14% through a printed Council newsletter and 12% through a television advertisement; and
- The majority of respondents use the app weekly (45%) followed by monthly (32%). However 18% of respondents had stopped using the app.

There are 60 active business rewards or businesses participating, with 119 redemptions at the time of writing (December 2020). This is up from 30 redemptions in August, which is a positive increase.

It is worth noting that CN and GreenBe are regularly updating and re-testing elements of the app to refine the app and maximise user responsiveness.

In summary, usage of the Lean-In Newy App is tracking well, with the membership target for September 2020 achieved. The number of challenges completed is also tracking well, with the number of redemptions up significantly since August 2020.

LOCAL ONLINE TRAINING PROGRAMS

Program description

The aim of the Local Online Training Program is to support local small business (<20 employees) to undertake upskilling and professional development training. This City of Newcastle program does this through providing funding to local accredited Registered Training Organisations providing training to local participants. The focus of these City of Newcastle funded RTO delivered programs was in turn on development of business skills, digital transformation and community sector support for participants during a prolonged period of COVID-induced 'downtime'. Training is aimed at providing business operators and their staff with ongoing benefit during the recovery phase from COVID-19 and beyond as the economy returns to a 'new normal' state. Courses are offered through Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) operating within the Newcastle LGA. Up to $500,000 has been allocated to this program.

RTOs were asked to develop training packages across the following focus areas:

- Business Resilience;
- Business Diversification;
- Business Agility;
- Business Innovation;
- Digital transformation / Readiness;
- Management and Finance;
- Community wellbeing and development;
- Diversity, Access and Inclusion; or
- Sustainability.

Key elements of the program as identified by the Program Manager include:

1. Specificity – Ability to change the narrative in response to impacts of COVID-19 or as social distancing is relaxed.
2. Aimed at local providers and local participants. The requirement is that the RTO needs to be locally based and to provide training to local recipients.
3. Targeted at providing tangible benefits to local sole traders, small businesses and SMEs. RTOs to develop relationships with small business and SMEs.
4. Courses must be delivered online to small businesses (rather than individuals).

Appropriateness

The program aligns with the key resilience package aim to deliver innovative programs that provide long-term strategic benefits for the city.

Staff were influenced by early national media reporting that suggested that the lockdown and the fallout from the pandemic (under and unemployment) would offer significant downtime that could be used toward participation in training and upskilling. Therefore, the concept of an online training program was recommended as a core component of CN's COVID-19 response.

The program design phase was iterative. Research was undertaken to understand the training landscape on a local, national and international level. Close attention was also paid to state and federal government initiatives. Initially program staff considered implementing a city-wide subscription to an overseas training provider. However, internal advice and communication from the state government recommended focusing on localised need and expertise. This led to a focus on the provision of training for small business operators and staff (which were perceived to most affected by the pandemic and lockdown), and delivered by local RTOs. The idea being that investment in the skills of SMEs would be beneficial to the local economy in the future. The funding will also have flow-on benefits for the RTOs themselves. Aside from the obvious financial benefit, the RTOs will develop further capacity in servicing the training needs of SMEs.

Research of current online training programs also revealed an oversupply of training courses that were not accredited. As CN wanted to create a legacy with their *Online Training Program*, the team decided that it should be accredited and that this, combined with a local focus, would create a real point of difference from state and federally funded training programs. In particular, it was hoped that those involved in the Program might be motivated to continue their education journey upon completion.

> *"A legacy indicates an ongoing benefit associated with an intervention that we've made. If students could acquire some level of accreditation it might mean they would continue their education journey."*

Implementation phase

As with other Resilience Package programs, the key to the successful implementation of the *Online Training* Program was the immediacy of CN's response to the potential impacts of the pandemic. The Program Manager and team members were closely monitoring the impact that virus was having in China and Italy prior to the virus being labelled as a global pandemic. Early discussions within the team were critical in laying the foundation for the CN's response, including the *Online Training* Program. These early conversations ensured that the entire program could be swiftly mobilised.

Preliminary discussions were held with local RTOS in order to gauge interest and assess the feasibility of an online program tailored to SMEs. An EOI was developed and sent to local RTOs on April 14. Given that the official lockdown took effect from March 31st, this is an extraordinary achievement.

The University of Newcastle, Novaskill and TAFE NSW were awarded contracts to deliver online training programs, with funding provided to the value of $311,300. Originally, it was anticipated that this will provide training collectively to 560 students. For each provider, a specific level of capacity was purchased, based on number of students undertaking a specific course. The type of courses undertaken (from the focus areas detailed above) were determined by demand from the SME sector. It was envisaged that this flexibility in delivery will ensure that the relevance and appropriateness of courses is likely to be high.

Interviews were conducted with representatives from each of the three RTOs in early November 2020.

Outcomes

Preliminary outcomes from the *Online Training Program* include:

- Upskilling of Program Manager and team members in terms of an understanding of/and experience navigating the RTO landscape, including development of future potential relationships;
- Upskilling of RTOs in terms of responsiveness to the needs of the local small business community in a short timeframe.

However, the Program Manager felt that the decision to target accredited RTOs, while purposeful, obviously prevented applications from non-accredited training organisations and resulted in fewer applications. It also meant that there were some gaps in the types of training offered, particularly with regard to the tourism and community sectors. Planning and design is underway for the second allotment of packages to be delivered next financial year to the value of $190K. It is anticipated that this stage of funding will allow a focus on gaps and unmet needs in the business community.

More broadly, the Program Manager noted that the interaction with other CN teams through the COVID Response Team, which was service unit wide, was beneficial in terms of capacity building.

> *"Contact with members of other teams can be infrequent. However, being part of the COVID Response team gave an opportunity to understand the capabilities of the broader team on a much deeper level."*

It is likely that the increased contact between members of different teams through the COVID Response Team will have an ongoing legacy for CN.

Interviews with RTOs

Interviews with representatives from Novaskill, TAFE NSW and the University of Newcastle were conducted in early November. It is important to note that of the three RTOs consulted, two had training programs that were still in the process of being delivered, and one RTO had only very recently delivered the course. This means that it has not been possible to gauge the impacts of the training for students. All of the RTOs were scheduled to provide further training through the program in early 2021. For this evaluation it means that it is not possible to detail the full array of program impacts at the time of writing.

Design

There was consensus among the RTO representatives that the aim and broad design of the Online Training Program was appropriate. The focus on upskilling business operators and staff during 'down time' caused by operational impacts as a result of COVID-19 was also felt to appropriate. That the program was free was felt to remove financial barriers to participation for individuals experiencing hardship. Delivering content online was considered to be COVID safe.

> *"I thought it was awesome that Council was stepping up to facilitate this funding. To us it seemed like the perfect time and that there are going to be heaps of businesses who would be interested in learning more about how their business could perform well."*

However, representatives from two of the RTOs felt that the EOI document from Council was lacking in detail, including:

- Greater depth included under each topic area:
  > *"The topic areas were good but vague. There was a sense that they [Council] left the decisions up to us", "It was a fairly broad scope from our perspective. There were topic areas but no indication or suggestion as to which topic areas should be covered*

off by each RTO. This led to a lot of duplication in terms of course content. This could have been handled better";

- Suggested course lengths; and

- Initial eligibility criteria. Specifically, the provision of a definition of a small business.

It was suggested that more upfront engagement with the RTOs, either before or after submission of the EOI would have allowed greater tailoring of the program to business operator needs.

In addition, one representative felt that more consistency could have been applied to the participating RTOs in terms of ensuring similar courses were offered in terms of course length and number of units included in each course.

One representative felt that the application process was rushed and that it was unclear that only RTOs located in the Newcastle LGA were eligible. This representative noted that a lengthy period of time passed before they were notified as to whether they had been successful. However, it is acknowledged that CN were operating in an uncertain climate at the time of the development of the program and that the design and execution phase were accelerated in order to provide early assistance to affected businesses.

No other comments were made about the application process.

Uptake

Uptake across the board was lower than expectations. As stated above, originally it was envisaged that up to 560 students could potentially participate in training, however the total number of enrolments across all three RTOs currently stands at 149. The following table summarises the course offerings by each RTO and includes the number of actual enrolments for each.

Table 7   **RTO Course Enrolments**

RTO	Course	Enrolments	Details
Novaskill	Digital Literacy	15	Courses were eight (8) weeks in length for one hour per week.
	Business Survival	8	
	Business Integrity	4	
	Networking and Community Engagement	3	
TAFE (allocation of 150 places)	Digital Marketing	17	Nine week program that covered three (3) units. A four hourly class once a week and one (1) hour study session to assist with assessments.
University of Newcastle (allocation of 70 places per course, up to 350 places in total)	Understanding Customer Behaviour in a Services Context	24	Two eight (8) week programs.
	Social Media Marketing and Communications	78	

In addition to the above:

- TAFE originally planned to provide five training modules in total including Management and Finance, Business Resilience, Business Diversification and Workplace and Teams. These programs were abandoned due to limited enrolments.
- The University of Newcastle had originally planned to also provide five courses in total but three courses were abandoned due to limited enrolments.

When unpacking the reasons for limited uptake, the following themes emerged:

Timing:

"It felt like it was a bit too late. A lot of businesses were already back at work. Some had lost staff so they were even busier working in the business rather than on the business. The feedback we got was that we don't have time to do this."

Perceived limited promotional support from Council:

"We thought that they [Council] were going to do a lot more promotion and introductions to key organisations that never happened. We were under the misguided assumption that there would be a big PR push but nothing ever happened."

Each RTO instead conducted their own communication activities which varied depending on the size of the RTO. This included activities like door knocking, social media advertising, snowballing and, in one case, a letter box drop.

Restrictive eligibility criteria: Initially, only staff from businesses with less than 20 staff were eligible to undertake the training. While this criterion was eventually relaxed, it is likely to have had an effect on early recruitment. Similarly, the requirement that businesses must be based in the Newcastle LGA was felt to affect uptake. Finally, originally students could only compete one course per RTO, but this was also relaxed given limited enrolments.

Course confusion: As the Federal Government had also announced free training programs, there was reportedly some confusion for potential students, particularly in the case of TAFE as a separate stream of free programs were also available.

Accreditation requirements: In general, the requirement that all courses be accredited resulted in decreased flexibility in terms of provision of course content. For example, TAFE were required to teach a unit on legislation, policy and procedures but students, who were in most cases business owners, already possessed adequate knowledge of legislative requirements. The TAFE representative explained:

"We have to make sure that from a compliance perspective that we are teaching the course requirements."

Pitched at the wrong level? Advice versus training: It was consistently raised by representatives from all three RTOs that business operators / students were less interested in undertaking accredited training than receiving tailored advice for their business:

"Feedback that we received indicated that people wanted to learn things that they could put into practice straight away, they didn't want to have to complete assignments"

"The accreditation component was not important to businesses - they were just after useful information."

One representative from an RTO noted that they felt that students expected to receive information and advice, rather than to complete assessments:

"People were after short and sharp advice and very specific to their business."

This is likely to have affected both enrolments and completion rates of courses.

One teacher at an RTO tried to modify the course to incorporate feedback on individual businesses websites and social media platforms which was well received. However, this would not have been possible if student numbers had not been low.

The University of Newcastle did have greater success with their most recent program (currently underway at the time of writing) - Social Media Marketing and Communications – with 78 enrolments in total. Representatives from the University felt that the higher enrolments could be attributed to a combination of a highly relevant and current topic – *"we had to knock people back with sticks"* - and longer lead time that allowed for more targeted marketing and communication activities.

Barriers to course completion

While final numbers of course completions were not available from the RTOs at the time of writing because courses were still underway, all of the RTOs noted considerable numbers of withdrawal of students during the course delivery period. The reasons offered by RTOs for incompletion of courses included:

- **Online offering:** Some business representatives / students had difficulty with the technical requirements that came with the online requirement *"A lot of the participants struggled with online."*
- **Overwhelmed by course content and assessments:** Feedback indicated that some students were overwhelmed (and surprised) by the requirements (including assessments) to complete the course.
- **Difficulty in tailoring content due to student industry diversity:** As small businesses can be diverse, this was reflected in the student makeup. For example, in one of Novaskill's courses they had business representatives that were marriage celebrants, accountants, florists etc. To overcome this issue Novaskill will narrow the target to specific industry sectors for future iterations of the program.
- **Free offering:** Two representatives felt that making the program free may have affected the value placed on the program by participants: *"We've found with free or government-subsidised skill sets that the participants have not contributed anything so their level of commitment and motivation isn't anywhere near as high as if they'd paid say $100 to complete the course."*

Early impacts

The following early **impacts of the Online Training Programs for the RTOs** were identified by representatives:

- **Creation of new course content** that can be marketed commercially: *"We've developed some fantastic courses that the Faculty is looking to promote overseas as exemplars of what we can do."*

- **Opportunity to engage with Newcastle business community** and to understand their specific needs;
- **Capacity building for staff** particularly with regard to the need to pivot in response to low enrolment and engagement with course content; and
- **Development of new systems and processes** to accommodate the Online Training Program.

Two RTOs noted negative impacts as a result of the program, including:
- Negative response from ineligible business operators / staff located outside the Newcastle LGA; and
- Unforeseen costs associated with processes put in place to manage program deliverables and changing timeframes e.g. scheduling, meetings, support from marketing team.

As previously mentioned, it is too early to provide feedback on the impacts for students that completed the relevant course offering. However, anecdotal evidence provided by two representatives from the RTOS suggests that business representatives were particularly appreciative of the opportunity to learn more about harnessing social media for marketing and communication purposes.

One RTO representative also mentioned that course participation had facilitated networking opportunities for business operators and staff.

Overall assessment

Although there have been some teething issues, all RTOs were supportive of the program's objectives and appreciative of the opportunity to work in partnership with CN to support small business.

"Fabulous initiative. It was just brilliant how they identified the need and were reactive to that need amongst business owners."

"It sent a message to the business community that there were people out there attempting to rebuild after what has been a very tough year financially."

In particular, the local focus was considered a strength of the program:

"I thought it was great that it was a local government initiative that enabled local RTOs to reach out to the local business community."

There was also broad support for the two major components of the program: that it was free to business operators (beneficial for those who might be experiencing financial hardship) and that it was online and therefore COVID safe. However, as noted, feedback from the RTOs suggested that the free aspect of the program may have ultimately worked against the program, as students might have felt less committed to the program. It has not been possible to explore this with students directly due to the maturity of the program. Likewise, while the online format was appropriate and effective for some students, feedback indicated that some students found the medium difficult and would prefer face-to-face interactions moving forward.

When looking at the measures of success as identified by the Program Manager at the program outset:

Measure of success	Outcome
Training offerings are targeted and aligned to business sector needs during crisis and into recovery.	Alignment of training to business sector needs has been an iterative process. The evaluation suggests that businesses were more interested in case management and advice rather than to complete accredited training. However, in saying that there has been a promising response to courses focused on social media marketing. Overall feedback suggests that businesses have benefited from tailored, specific advice, rather than theoretical information.
Participants that take up training are inspired to extend their education and training journey.	Too early to assess given training programs are still underway.
Participating businesses are better able to recover, manage disruption and handle organisational change. Management and staff acquire the skills required to address sector shortfalls.	Too early to assess given training programs are still underway.

However, it is important to note that when asked, RTOs did appreciate and feel that Council involvement in the provision of training was appropriate given the aim was to support local small businesses.

As the program is still in progress, CN could consider removal of the condition that courses need to be accredited. This will allow RTOs greater flexibility to tailor course content and length to suit student needs.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

City of Newcastle (CN) carries out a community survey on a quarterly basis to better understand key issues, community needs and priorities about the services and facilities provided by the City.

The survey conducted in winter 2020 focused on the City's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and was promoted through social, digital and traditional media channels. The online survey was open from 1 June to 21 June 2020 and a total of 401 people completed the survey.

With regard to attitudes toward the Resilience Package, there was a high level of support for CNs role in the City's economic recovery (88%). A further 58% were also supportive of CN creating stimulus work in response to the economic impact of the pandemic.

Without prompting, just over a third (35%) were aware that CN had developed support initiatives for the City. With promoting, awareness was highest with regard to the following initiatives:
- Financial Hardship (53%)
- Expanded E-Library (50%)
- Rent Relief (50%)
- Community Grants Program (37%)
- Relaxing certain restrictions on small business (33%)
- Free online educational resources and training opportunities (such as Lynda and Studiosity) (28%)
- City Taskforce (25%)

- Lean-in Newy (20%)
- Online training for small business owners and their employees (19%)

Overall, most respondents agreed that the different elements of the Resilience Package were worthwhile support for those in need, with the Financial Hardship (59%) and Rent Relief Programs (55%) receiving strong endorsement. Similarly, relaxing restrictions on businesses (56%) and the Rent Relief Program (52%) were also highly endorsed as programs that will help the City get through this period. Expansion of the E-Library was endorsed most strongly on being a good example of how an organisation can help regular people (43%). However, perceived personal (household) relevance of each of the Resilience Package elements across the board was quite low.

Respondents were asked whether they had used, or intended to use, several of the key support initiatives developed by CN. Use of the E-Library system was highest (15%) and a further 22% felt that they would probably use or access the E-Library in the future. This was followed by the Lean-In Newy App, which 8% had used and 13% were felt that they would probably use in the future. The Community Grants and Online Training programs were considered to have the least amount of relevance with 58% and 65% respectively responding that the programs had limited personal relevance.

When provided with a description of CN's Community and Economic Resilience Package (CERP), 70% of people agreed the CERP would help the City get through this period. **Significantly, almost two-thirds (74%) indicated that CN's response met or exceeded their expectations.**

CONCLUSION

This evaluation has been conducted in order to understand some of the early impacts of the City of Newcastle's COVID-19 Economic and Social Resilience Package. While it has not been possible to gauge the impact of some of the programs at this stage due to varying project timeframes, where possible, this report has identified some key benefits for residents, NfPs and business operators within the Newcastle LGA.

Firstly, the **speed** at which the City of Newcastle acted to develop the Package has clearly been an asset. The design of the package was largely completed and presented to the Council Executive Team on the 18th March 2020, almost two weeks before the state went into lockdown. This timeframe is impressive, particularly as it required cross-team collaboration working in unchartered territory. Ultimately, early planning and quick mobilisation meant that programs could be approved and implemented quickly. The end result was that citizens impacted by the virus could be assisted promptly.

Another major strength of the program is that it is **well-rounded**, particularly with regard to careful consideration and identification of segments likely to be most affected by COVID-19 – namely vulnerable populations, the unemployed and small business. From a grant program designed to assist NfPs to meet the needs of vulnerable groups, expansion of the E-Library to increase the wellbeing, study and training needs of a population in self-isolation, and an online training program specifically targeting SMEs, the City of Newcastle has actively pursued an array of avenues to provide real assistance to its citizenry. A community survey conducted by the City of Newcastle indicated that support for the package was high, with almost two-thirds (70%) in agreement that the package will assist the city to deal with the impacts of COVID-19.

Significantly, the Resilience Package represents a **new way of working** for Council. Firstly, it has been the single largest crisis since WWII faced by the City at a local level, which is also true of many local governments across the globe. In addition, the response package was also a first as it involved the delivery across a breadth of program areas (small business, residents, vulnerable communities). Finally, but related to this last point, it required CN staff with diverse skill sets across disciplines to work together toward a shared goal under extreme time constraints with many unknowns.

> *"The whole COVID response team demonstrated the value of pulling a unit together with a really diverse skills. This will contribute to the continued growth of the organisation in the future."*

The package has delivered **direct actions to support City of Newcastle community wellbeing** in the following ways:

- The Rapid Response Grant Program that assisted NfPs to cater for increasing need over the past several months. The majority of funded activities were food related, indicating that the demand for essential items was felt more acutely by vulnerable groups during this period. Grant recipients reported that the funded activities (increased provision of food and essential items) resulted in increased wellbeing for clients, particularly those experiencing isolation and mental health issues.

- Access to an increased online offering through the E-Library for entertainment and study purposes. The survey with n=567 respondents indicated that 46% used the platform more frequently during lockdown and that 82% will continue to use the platform in the future. Satisfaction with the E-Library was also high with 87% either very satisfied or satisfied.

The City of Newcastle, through the package has developed **timely responses that address cash-flow for small business** as demonstrated through:
- A 50% discount for businesses that are City of Newcastle tenants through the Rent Relief Program; and
- Potential cash flow relief through rates deferral through the Financial Hardship Program

The Lean-In Newy App is an example of an **innovative program that has the potential to provide long-term strategic benefits for the city.** The app is a first of its kind for Australia and there is considerable potential for the app in the face of further social distancing impacts on communities and business as the pandemic continues.

The Grant Program is an excellent example of **collaboration with partners and contribution to existing initiatives.** The evaluation to date has indicated that the Grant program has led to strengthening of relationships between the community sector and Council, which is likely to have long-standing benefits for the City.

Likewise, the Online Training Program has led to development of relationships between RTOs and local businesses, with early feedback indicating capacity building amongst local RTOs.

The following early impacts of the program have been identified by stakeholder group.

Table 8: Early impacts of the Resilience Package by stakeholder group

Stakeholder group	Impacts
Small Business operators and staff	- Cash flow relief from the 50% discount for City of Newcastle tenants on rent through the Rent Relief Program - Potential cash flow relief through rates deferral through the Financial Hardship Program - Financial benefits associated with the Lean-In Newy App in the form of 119 redemptions of points made by app subscribers - Access to online training programs tailored to Small Business (149 students enrolled as at November 2020)
Community / NfP sector and clients	$172,466 in funds through the **Rapid Response Grant Program** to assist those in urgent need as a result of COVID-19 $512,172 in funds as part of the **Boost Our City Grant Program** to 32 local organisations to assist vulnerable community members affected by COVID-19 - Rent relief to a number of local community organisations over a six month period - Enabled select NfP organisations to pivot during the crisis to most effectively meet the needs of their clients - Purchase of technical and other equipment to allow staff to work remotely and/or manage with increased client need - Reported increased health and wellbeing for clients who received food, care packages and staff support as a result of the funding

Stakeholder group	Impacts
	• Increased trust in CN and development of relationships with CN staff members
Broader community	• Potential cash flow relief through rates deferral through the Financial Hardship Program • Access to an increased online offering through the E-Library expansion and increased frequency of use of the platform by community members during and post lockdown • Access to free online training through Studiosity and Lynda • Discounted options at local businesses through their contribution to the community through the Lean In Newy app.
City of Newcastle	• Capacity building for staff and the broader organisation, both program-specific and in terms of crisis response experience • Team building and strengthening of professional relationships – particularly staff on the Resilience Package project team • Increased knowledge of certain sectors, especially small business, the community and training sectors • Demonstrated leadership in a crisis situation • Generation of goodwill from community members, NfPs and businesses • Strengthening of relationships with keys groups such as the local NfP and RTO sector

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

A number of elements of the package rollout have been identified that could have improved the implementation process, including:

- As already noted, the launch of the Lean-In Newy App was delayed, and this has likely affected take-up. In addition, a survey with users found that there may be some issues with the design of the app, particularly with regard to difficulty in completing challenges and redeeming rewards. This is in the process of being addressed, and changes to the app will be evaluated in future reports.

- Feedback has indicated that there may have been a delay in the package communication campaign due to the City's COVID-19 communication and marketing activities being directed at the closure of public facilities (e.g. signage and information about restrictions etc). The City may have benefited from a more coordinated approach in its internal (focused on core council roles and responsibilities) and external (focused on the resilience package) communication and marketing earlier on. The promotion of the *Resilience Package* in a timely manner would have benefited visibility of the Lean-in Newy and E-Library programs, for which take-up is dependent on public awareness.

- Discussions with the RTOs involved with the Online Training Program revealed a number of issues that likely affected uptake including timing of the program, the initial eligibility criteria being too restrictive and a perception that CN promotion of the program was limited. In addition, there was a sense that the program was not pitched at the right level as business operators and their staff were more interested in tailored business advice than undertaking accredited training. Although the RTOs consulted were supportive of the broad aims of the program, it was suggested that CN could have undertaken more detailed engagement to gather advice from the RTOs initially in order to shape the design of the program.

ATTACHMENT A – LEADING PRACTICES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO COVID-19

Leading Practices in Local Government Responses to COVID-19
SUMMARY, APRIL-JUNE 2020

This report presents an overview of the challenges and examples of responses by local governments in Australia, the United States, Europe and the UK as they work to counter the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 over the immediate and longer terms.

The coverage comprises excerpts from a fortnightly written and verbal briefing provided to the City of Newcastle between April and June.

Reporting starts from 6 April amid rolling shutdowns across the globe. At this early stage of the crisis, initiatives by local authorities were focused on delivering responses to meet the critical and most pressing economic and social needs of their communities.

Over the ensuing six weeks, strategies here and overseas moved from critical response to maintaining local economies while in stasis, with much of the focus on supporting SMEs. Part of this effort involved targeted assistance for vulnerable industries (such as hospitality, tourism and the arts) to ensure they were able to return once economies opened again. The efforts in economic support and development in recent weeks have started to turn to recovery as restrictions begin to lift.

Alongside economic support, promoting community wellbeing has been a common thread throughout the crisis with an initial focus on harnessing the resources of volunteers, moving to initiatives by councils, to a strong focus on support for the most vulnerable in the community including older people, women, international students and young people.

The following diagram illustrates the key areas where Australia's local governments have been focusing their services and support.

Source: LGiU, 23 April 2020

More broadly, the pandemic has prompted discussions by governments and communities about resetting existing approaches to policy and program development to promote greater social equity and inclusion for vulnerable or marginalised groups. Making communities more environmentally sustainable in a post-pandemic world has also been widely promoted.

LEADERSHIP & COLLABORATION

Cross-sector and government taskforces have been established at different scales in Australia and overseas. One example is the 'Global Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force', which brings mayors of C40 cities together including Australian representatives to discuss how to use public investment in the recovery for city economies. The focus is on eliminating pollution and poverty, improving public health and increasing resilience to shocks.

More here: C40 Mayors Taskforce

In Australia, examples include a series of regional roundtables that have been established in Victoria to help the state government identify the different opportunities and impacts of COVID-19 for local communities, in order to drive social and economic recovery across the State.

More here: Premier of Victoria

A North Queensland COVID-19 Recovery Taskforce will work together to support economic recovery across the region and to effectively engage the Queensland and Federal

Governments to encourage investment in the region, with a focus on the employment and social impacts of the pandemic.
More here: Townsville City Council

ECONOMIC SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT

According to ABS data, seven in 10 businesses have seen their revenue reduced as a result of the pandemic. 70% of businesses have also changed the way they operate, making them twice as likely to report a decrease in revenue compared to those trading normally (83% against 37%). 55% of Australian businesses also accessed business support, such as wage subsidy measures, due to the pandemic.

More here: Business Insider

To support economic recovery, McKinsey's global research suggests that governments and their partners need to focus on the most vulnerable sectors in their local economies. They recommend taking urgent action in the following areas: create a granular view of who needs help to keep their job or find new work; and build smart, cross-sector solutions to get help to them fast.

More here: McKinsey

Surveys of local businesses to connect and learn more about the impact of COVID-19 have been rolled out by individual councils (such as the Blue Mountains and Geelong) and joint organisations of councils (such as the Eastern Region Group of Councils).

The latter was a collaboration of a network of councils' economic development managers, which was well-established prior to the pandemic. The survey has since been taken up and promoted nationally by REMPLAN. The six councils have framed their business support packages around the survey findings:

- personal phone calls
- financial counselling
- legal advice
- assistance with moving online
- training of all types.

In Canberra, a business liaison phone line has been created to assist businesses to understand the support that is available to them through the 'ACT Economic Survival Package' and to provide practical advice for businesses.

More here: <u>ACT Economic Survival Package</u>

Other LGAs providing hands-on and targeted support for businesses include Bellingen Shire Council working with the three local Chambers of Commerce to run the Business Information Centre (from the now closed Visitors Information Centre). They are also running a phone hotline where businesses operators can find support for government grants, adaptation advice and peer support.

Geelong's Business Support Program is providing personalised access to professional advice on human resources, financial management and digital marketing that is free of charge for local businesses impacted by the pandemic. Also on offer is expert business mentoring for industry-specific advice.

More here: <u>Geelong Business Support Program</u>

In Australia and overseas, buy local campaigns started early in the crisis to support local small business. Examples in Australia include the City of Bayswater 'Buy in Baysie' online directory to promote local businesses and the Town of Victoria Park's #StillOpenForBusiness campaign.

In another example, Northern Rivers Business Chamber runs the *Bigger Backyard* project to encourage locals to increase spending in their region, and to match suppliers and clients. The initiative is a partnership between the local business chamber, seven local governments, state government and the university.

More here: Bigger Backyard

Southern Downs Regional Council is foregoing some revenue streams in order to support local businesses, particularly in industries that have been hardest hit such as tourism and hospitality. Measures include a fee-waiving strategy covering: licensing fees for restaurants/food businesses; interest on overdue rates for those suffering financial hardship; annual licence fees for rental accommodation and caravan park operators; and temporary entertainment event fees.

More here: SDRC Council

The ACT Government has released a support package providing relief to the hospitality and hotel industry. Measures include a $1,000 rebate on electricity bills for cafés and restaurants for the first quarter of 2020-21 and a rebate on the water and sewerage fixed charge for the first two quarters for hotels and serviced apartments.

More here: The Canberra Times

In a bid to increase outdoor seating, councils are looking at a range of measures including converting parking spaces into parklets. This has been a practice in the US for some years. A recent parklet study in Perth found a 20-35% increase in local footfall, and 89% community support. In Melbourne, Moreland Council has one long-term parklet in Brunswick. Perth and Adelaide are following suit.

Parklet at Th Grand View Hotel.
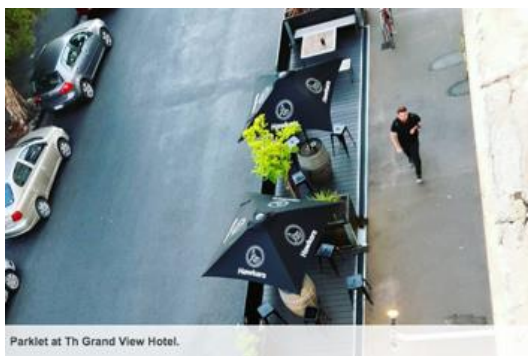
More here: The Conversation   The Age

Activating CBDs and high streets is a focus for many local governments including Wollongong and Adelaide. The Brookings Institution has provided an analysis and recommendations to help small business and regenerate the local economy including profit-sharing leases, place-based governance and a rapid public-sector response. In another analysis by the Local Government Information Unit, Renew Newcastle was highlighted as one of three initiatives available to activate CBDs. In a similar vein, the UK's Empty Shops Network and Meanwhile Space were provided as other models.

More here: Brookings Institution   CBD reactivation

Support for the arts has been delivered in both mainstream and innovative ways. Grants have been offered by numerous councils to support arts and creative communities during the shutdown.

Taking a different tack, Queensland, NSW and Victoria Councils are hosting COVID-safe, drive-in, live music concerts in partnership with Drive-In Entertainment Australia. In-car entertainment has been adopted for other purposes too. A German night club is hosting discos in a car park. Czech theatre companies are taking over parking lots with the audience enjoying the performance from their car. Limerick City and County Council is running drive-in gigs.

More here: Brisbane   Sydney   Uruguay   Germany   Ireland

While spending on big infrastructure is being put forward as part of government approaches to stimulate the economy, many are arguing for smaller, targeted projects such as water-management infrastructure, new cycleways and renewable energy projects. These initiatives provide jobs and create economic stimulus while working through a backlog of projects. The CEO for the Committee for the Hunter made a similar observation.

More here: Sydney Morning Herald   The Fifth Estate   Committee for the Hunter comment

In this vein, Victoria's 38 rural councils will receive $100,000 each from the Victorian Government to enhance ICT facilities. The program is designed to allow the councils to engage, consult and support their local communities better and to enhance remote working resources.

More here: Premier of Victoria

The Tasmanian Government has released a record infrastructure package to reboot the local economy and provide more jobs. Funded projects include 1,000 new social houses, which will be built over the next three years using an allocated $100 million.

More here: Tasmanian Government

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Local councils have embraced online tools and social media platforms to promote physical and mental health and wellbeing among their communities during the crisis.

From the start of the shutdown, councils were inundated with offers from their communities to volunteer. Without the capacity to manage volunteer services, many used partnerships with local providers and online tools to coordinate offers of help. On example of many, Camden in the UK launched its Time to Spare web page, where members of the community can register to help out.
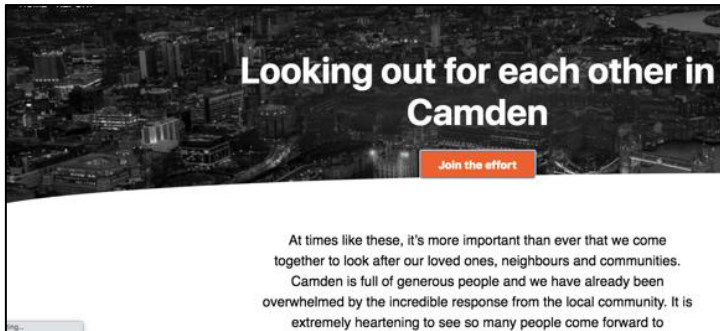
More here: Time to spare

Mayo County in Ireland built an interactive map to coordinate its volunteer support using existing community networks. The development of the map offered a clear picture of what was available in the community, which groups were well-coordinated and resourced, which towns or villages needed a follow up to get organised, and where efforts were being duplicated.
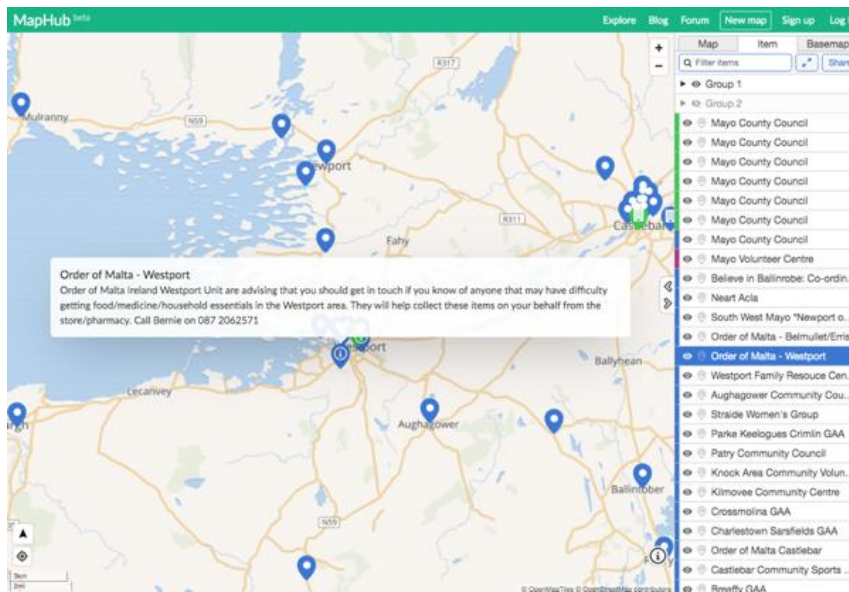
More here: Mayo volunteer support

Building on this concept, many local authorities maximised their websites to provide a one-stop-shop on information to support their communities. The #Silicon Valley Strong in the US is one example:

FIND FREE MEALS

☑ STAYING SAFE	$ FINANCIAL HELP	♥ HELP YOUR NEIGHBOR
• Know the Symptoms • Stay Home • Testing & Treatment • Essential Activities	• Rent & Mortgage Relief • Economic Impact Payments • Find Employment • Access Unemployment Benefits	• Volunteer • Donate • Give Blood • Shop Local

👤 HELP FOR SENIORS	💬 MENTAL HEALTH	👥 HELP FOR FAMILIES
• Senior Grocery Hour • Find Senior Support Services • Meals on Wheels • Friendship Line (800) 971-0016	• Coping with Stress & Anxiety • Suicide & Crisis Hotline • AA & NA Meetings • Domestic Violence Hotline	• School Meals Map • How to Help Children Cope • Digital Learning Tools • Family Mental Health Services

Dial 2-1-1 to get connected to a specialist for personalized assistance

Free, confidential, 24/7, & available in multiple languages

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

- I can't pay my rent or mortgage
- I need an extension on my taxes
- I need a loan, disability claim, or to file for unemployment
- I need help as an employer or employee

- I need, or my family needs mental health support
- I want to know how we are protecting the homeless
- I want to donate or help make medical supplies

NUTRITION & MEALS

School Meal Pickups	Free Meals Near You	Delivery & Take Out
Senior Grocery Hours	Senior Meal Locations	Help for Groceries

Blayney Shire Council in NSW is one of many examples of a social media campaign to spread awareness of the need to stay at home and practice social distancing, encourage a positive state of mind and support local businesses.

Let's get some #positive vibes going

Win a $50 gift voucher to a local takeaway business of your choice!

City of Newcastle – COVID-19 Economic and Social Resilience Package – Evaluation Report
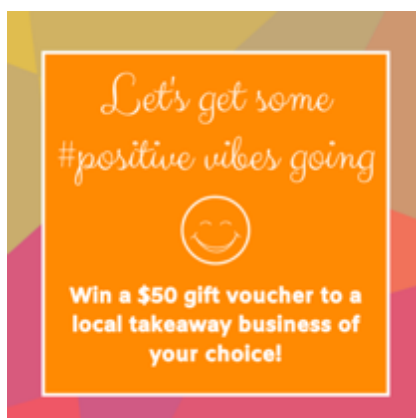
The concept of greater engagement with communities by local authorities is prosecuted by researchers at Griffith University, who are calling for planners and policymakers to move from 'planning for people' to 'planning with people'.

More here: The Conversation

In keeping with this theme, Edinburgh launched an online mapping tool that enables people to share suggestions for creating safer spaces for walking, cycling and wheeling as the lockdown restrictions begin to be lifted. The public can use the Commonplace platform to highlight specific areas on an interactive map and provide feedback on barriers experienced, as well as identifying improvements.
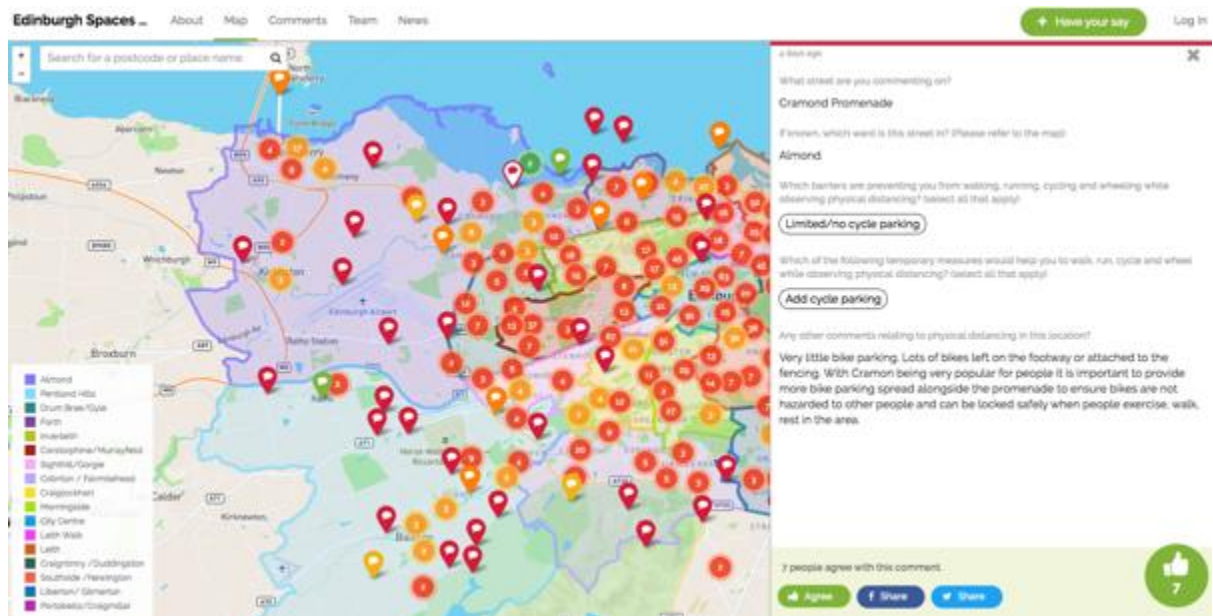
More here: Edinburgh

Adelaide Council also launched an online idea-sharing platform and is inviting everyone to contribute to helping the city recover quickly from the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 as part of its Recover + Reimagine program.
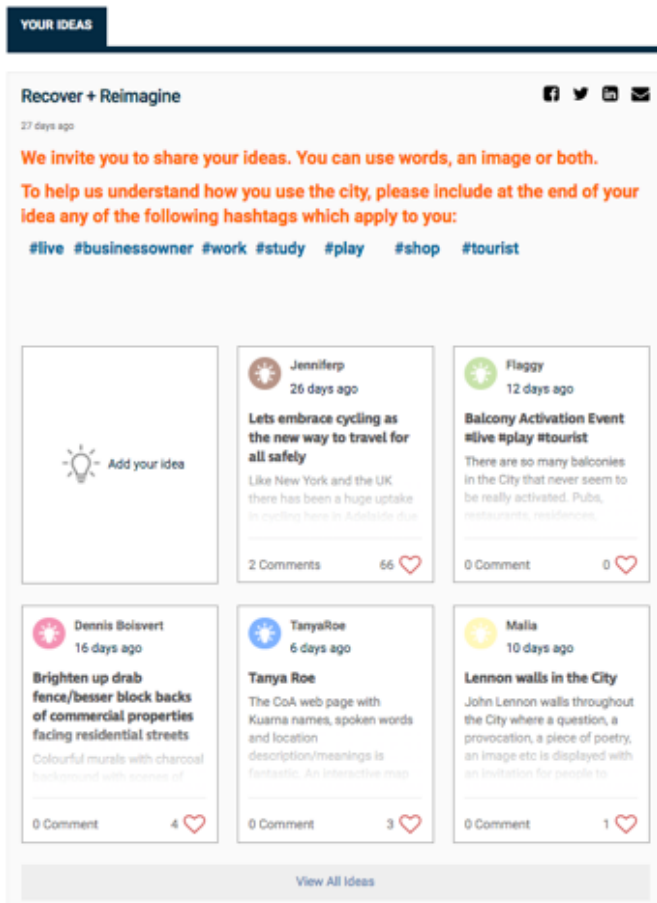
More here: Adelaide

SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Women have emerged as one of the most vulnerable groups impacted by the pandemic. In the US, the economy lost 20.5 million jobs between March and April 2020. Among the most affected populations were women. A similar impact is being felt in Australia. In recessions in the 1980s and 1990s, about three-fourths of those losing jobs were men. More than half of the direct workforce victims so far have been female. Women are also now shouldering a larger proportion of additional household care responsibilities incurred by COVID-19.

More here: US Australia

The Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre has published a report following a survey of 166 practitioners responding to violence against women (VAW) working in 49 Victorian local government areas. 59 per cent of respondents reported an increase in the frequency of VAW during the pandemic and 50 per cent reported that the severity of VAW has increased. 42 per cent noted that first-time family violence had risen.

More here: Analysis & Policy Observatory

YWCA National Housing has published a new report showing housing difficulties experienced by women on low or moderate incomes living in regional Australia. 63 per cent of women surveyed experienced some level of housing stress, with 1 in 8 having been homeless in the last five years. 1 in 4 of these women hid their homelessness from others.

More here: YWCA National Housing

It is well-established that recessions hit young people the hardest, and that this pandemic is following the same path. Research by the University of Melbourne has taken a different approach to understanding the problem by considering how long the effects of a recession last on young people. They found that the impact for some remains more than 40 years later, following them into retirement.

More here: Lasting impact of recession on youth

Supporting this thesis, a new policy paper by the Centre for Social Impact details significant social impacts for young people for years to come – including a harder transition from education to employment, mental health issues, welfare dependency and economic inequality. Recommendations by the Centre include amending *JobKeeper* eligibility requirements, investing in employment services to personalise support, and encouraging young people to continue with higher education through loan exemptions and free courses.

More here: Centre for Social Impact

A Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) survey of young people has found that their short and long-term concerns related to COVID-19 were for the economy, personal finance, the impact on education, mental health concerns, and how vulnerable communities will be impacted**.** FYA is releasing a series of projects to support young Australians including:

a Youth Response Fund to back youth-led organisations responding to the immediate needs of young people (applications close Friday 12 June at 12pm);
the Local and Vocal campaign supporting young people to meet (virtually) with their local Federal MP in the lead up to the 2020 Federal Budget (launching this week);
a COVID-19 Media Centre profiling and increasing the presence of young people's voices in mainstream media; and
the Future Communities Challenge for people aged 12-25 to lead their own learning and apply their skills to issues they care about most.

More here: *FYA programs*   *FYA survey*

Turning to other vulnerable groups, an Age-Friendly City Plan has been launched by the ACT Government following feedback from older Canberrans. Actions included in the plan range from running a pilot scheme to encourage local businesses to employ older people to working to make local areas and shopfronts dementia friendly.

More here: ACT Government

Also in the ACT, the government has launched a suite of online resources to help workers in the Territory who have experienced isolation, anxiety and poor mental health during the pandemic. Businesses and employers are encouraged to participate in the Government's 'Mentally Healthier Workplaces' initiative and incorporate the resources into a 12-month action plan to help employees in the long term.

More here: ACT Government

GREENER & CLEANER COMMUNITIES

Many local authorities in Australia and overseas have taken advantage of quieter streets and public spaces during shutdown to advance their clean energy and green agendas.

Tree planting has been a focus for a number of areas to deliver employment and benefits for the environment: Canberra plans to plant 4,000 trees and Sutherland Shire Council 3,000 trees, while Darebin City Council in Victoria has redeployed staff to help plant 30,000 indigenous trees, plants and grasses. Melbourne City is the latest to announce its revegetation program with plans to plant 150,000 trees and shrubs to create jobs and enhance public spaces.

More here: Canberra   Sutherland   Melbourne

Overseas, Milan announced that it will transform 35km of streets over the summer for cyclists and pedestrians. The plan includes low cost temporary cycle lanes, widened pavements, 30kph speed limits and pedestrian/cyclist priority streets.

More here: The Guardian

Milan is joined by other cities using the coronavirus crisis to re-evaluate their relationship with cars: Rome, Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Oakland California, Portland, Boston and Washington are developing and / or implementing temporary and permanent measures to give priority access to cyclists and pedestrians. There were also increasing calls in London for authorities to consider more space for cyclists and pedestrians once the lock down is lifted.

More here: European cities   US cities   UK

Business leaders in the UK are urging the government to use the opportunity presented by the COVID-19 lockdown to develop a greener economy. Proposed actions include investment and job creation in the green energy sector, and tying any economic bailout for businesses to clear green objectives. In Seoul, local government is developing a 'Green New Deal' to be implemented after the pandemic to create jobs and reduce carbon emissions.

More here: UK   Seoul

Attachment A: National League of Cities summary of COVID-19 responses by cities

In response to a request to identify strategies undertaken by local governments to address impacts on youth employment from COVID-19, Professor Will Rifkin, Director of the Hunter Research Foundation Centre, examined a repository of leading practice examples and benchmarks, the database of US city responses to COVID-19 assembled by the National League of Cities: https://covid19.nlc.org/resources/covid-19-local-action-tracker/

Beyond the more frequent responses applied by many authorities, such as rate relief, two types of examples were selected – (1) measures for benchmarking strategies that the City of Newcastle has employed, e.g., rent assistance/relief; and (2) programs that are unique or otherwise worth noting.

Strategies addressing low income

Cedar Rapids, Iowa - eviction prevention program
Toledo, Ohio - emergency renter assistance program
Los Angeles, California - another $100 million in rental assistance, to cover two months
Waco, Texas - three months of rental assistance
Palm Bay, Florida - eviction prevention/assistance
Chicago - no interest loans and grants for affordable housing tenants to pay mortgages

Kansas City - a third attorney to provide legal assistance for those in danger of eviction.

Unique initiatives

Williamsburg, VA: regional library dispatched mobile wi-fi hot spots to areas needing internet access.

Wooster, Ohio: building inspections of various types can be done via Skype.

Chicago, Illinois: city has established a new partnership with Airbnb to support residents fleeing violence during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Greater New Orleans: The Greater New Orleans Foundation Service and Hospitality Family Assistance Program will provide grants of up to $1,000 for service and hospitality workers whose families are experiencing financial crisis.

Rochester, NY: expanded access to 'Financial Empowerment' centres to help individuals with personal financial challenges.

Portland, Oregon: Prosper Portland's Economic Recovery Task Force launched the Addressing the Digital Divide Work Group to better understand technology gaps for residents throughout the city.

Madison, Wisconsin – Madison Internet Access Information Line: For those who need help finding access to the internet, library staff can assist in locating nearby public wifi, or provide information about free or low-cost internet access plan options and contact information.

Standing out as having a suite of particularly progressive strategies to respond to COVID-19 impacts are the cities of Madison, Wisconsin and Tampa, Florida.

ATTACHMENT B – EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

COVID-19 Community and Economic Development Resilience Package – Phase 1 Evaluation Framework

Program Principles
- Direct actions to support City of Newcastle community wellbeing
- Timely responses that address cash-flow for small business
- Innovative programs that provide long-term strategic benefits
- Collaboration with partners and contribution to existing initiatives
- Financial responsibility for the long-term sustainability of the organisation.

Over-arching evaluation questions
1. **How is the package supporting community wellbeing in the Newcastle LGA? In this context, community wellbeing is defined as 'the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential[6].'**

2. **How is the package providing timely responses that address cash-flow problems for small business?**

3. **Has the package represented value for money?**

4. **What has worked well? What has worked not so well?**

5. **How has CN shown innovation, partnership and adaptability in responding to the crisis?**

Timing – evaluation from April 2020.

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[6] Wiseman, J. & Brasher, K. (2008) Community Wellbeing in an Unwell World: Trends, Challenges, and Possibilities. J Public Health Policy. 2008 Sep;29(3):353-66. doi: 10.1057/jphp.2008.16.

Table B.1 Priority program elements for the evaluation are shown in red.

Program	Evaluate	Key Research Questions	Proposed Method	Responsibilities	Impact Measures	Program Detail
Financial Hardship Support No follow up with participants	Yes	% take-up? (modelled on 25% take-up)? {Take-up proxy for how the local economy is travelling}. How many LGAs offering in NSW?	Track take-up (weekly data release), track deferred expenditure.	Anthea	Reduction in financial stress for households	Scheme offers deferment of rates for residents and businesses that are commercial ratepayer/owner occupier or can demonstrate financial measures to support tenants.
Procurement and Purchasing Support	Yes	1. Has the new procurement policy been implemented? Has the target been met? 2. In what types of CN expenditure is local procurement highest? What number, types of business have been the beneficiaries? How many dollars spent locally? 3. What has been the material effect, flow	Analysis of CN financial data (assuming capacity to analyse 'local' and 'non-local' expenditure, i.e. that's a flag in the dataset).	Anthea	Support for local businesses via CN supply-chains % CN businesses remain solvent	CN will promote its new Procurement Policy to all staff, which includes a minimum local weighting assessment of 10%. Where possible this weighting will be increased through to 30 September 2020.

Program	Evaluate	Key Research Questions	Proposed Method	Responsibilitie s	Impact Measures	Program Detail
		through in dollars, on local economy (pre and post comparison)? How many more dollars have flowed locally than would have flowed through without the program? 4. Any unintended benefits or consequences of the new procurement policy?				
City of Newcastle Support	No					Range of smaller-scale measures to assist social-distancing, waive library and booking fees and support doctors surgeries to stay open longer.
Rent Relief for City of Newcastle Tenants	Yes	1. Promotion/take-up/timeliness? 2. Dollar assistance provided - $ rent deferred	Online survey recipients Semi-structured interviews	Anthea/Kris	Timely support to address cash-flow for businesses	50% discount on rent for all CN-owned buildings for the June and September quarter

Program	Evaluate	Key Research Questions	Proposed Method	Responsibilities	Impact Measures	Program Detail
		3. What have been the identifiable benefits for recipients e.g. jobs saved, businesses able to stay solvent, financial stress avoided, etc.	Good news stories/ qualitative based 'hardship story'			
E-Library Expansion	Yes	1. Has there been an increase in take-up/subscribers? 2. How satisfied are subscribers with the collection? What have been the benefits of subscription over this period? 3. Which demographic groups have been the most active subscribers? What have been the range of benefits	Analysis of longitudinal data on E-Library subscriptions, can compare pre and post COVID Analysis of usage data (e.g. # and type of online learning sessions, # downloads of e-books, e-audio, songs, movies) Online survey subscribers Good news stories	Kris/Anthea	Greater awareness of resource and subscription? Benefits to resident well-being Online training and learning opportunities	Significant expansion of existing digital library More active CN (targeted communications campaign) promotion of resource during lockdown/hibernation period.

Program	Evaluate	Key Research Questions	Proposed Method	Responsibilities	Impact Measures	Program Detail
		4. Take-up of online training and learning opportunities				
Online Learning – Studiosity & Lynda	Yes	1. Has take-up met benchmarks? (How successful targeted communications campaign – raising awareness on access and use)? 2. How many participants/sessions completed/videos viewed? 3. Who has participated? 4. Satisfaction with course content? Which courses most popular? 5. What have been the identified benefits	Approach to Lynda to analyse subscriber data or to conduct online survey of participants Good news stories? Profiling someone who is using the time to upskill?	Kris/Anthea	Benefits in terms of community wellbeing Contribute to the upskilling of the local population Most digitally literate small-business community in Australia.	CN will promote their existing online training programs and expand their tutoring support. Focus on strategic business development opportunities: • Digital literacy • Online retail • Digital marketing • Business transformation

Program	Evaluate	Key Research Questions	Proposed Method	Responsibilities	Impact Measures	Program Detail
		of participation in the program? Focus on evidence of upskilling, and associated benefits				
Community Grant Program	Yes	Appropriateness of eligibility and selection criteria? Responding and prioritising in crisis (organisational learning) Timeliness of grants– has process facilitated rapid response? How has CN organisational change (cutting red tape) facilitated the program? Benefits to organisations receiving community grants? Benefits to ultimate recipients – outputs and outcomes?	Program data Semi-structured interviews with NFPs receiving grant Good news stories Acquittal data (acquittal data to supplement outcome measurement)	Anthea/Kris	Increased capacity of local not-for profits to deliver services during local crises and community resilience. Supporting NFP for service continuity, scaling and digital innovation. Impact on wellbeing of recipients (alleviation financial stress, improvement in subjective wellbeing, access to crisis support,	Financial and in-kind support to mobilise to assist non-government organisations, not-for-profits, charities and community groups to scale and respond to community need.

Program	Evaluate	Key Research Questions	Proposed Method	Responsibilities	Impact Measures	Program Detail
					digital access and connectivity) # volunteers # people assisted (existing clients vs new) #length of contact with clients	
City Taskforce and Industry Responses	Yes	What has been achieved, solutions brokered (work-streams)? How has the taskforce provided innovative and targeted support to heavily impacted local industries? Have productive working relationships been established that would not have ordinarily existed? Legacy of taskforce? What has worked well? What has not worked well?	Analysis of representation, program agenda/ minutes/other documentation Semi-structured interviews	Anthea/Kris Kate/Will	What has the taskforce achieved which would not have been achieved otherwise? How has the taskforce assisted the City in responding to the crisis?	City Taskforce, led by CN, to act as the local coordinating authority to oversee the second and recovery phases of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.
Lean-In Newy	Yes	Resident and business awareness/% take-up?	Analysis of take-up/engagement –	Kris/Anthea	How has CN been a local/national	"*Lean-In Newy*" is a social action and economic incentive app

Program	Evaluate	Key Research Questions	Proposed Method	Responsibilities	Impact Measures	Program Detail
		Perception of value in assisting? Has the program delivered value for money? Has the app changed CN community behaviour? In reference to the program, explore the role of civic-tech and citizen engagement in change How has the app helped to address unmet community, Community Sector and business needs? Capacity to drive pro-social behaviour, CN subsidy of social behaviour and additional individual investment in local business (via users redeeming rebates) App as an example of CN's organisational innovation.	downloads, social media hits, shares, etc. Analysis of web-site to document outputs: Number of downloads /users of the GreenBe App Businesses onboarded/ Rebates offered / redeemed, Cost of rebate to CN, Resident contribution to redeem rates, demographic of users, tasks started and completed Solutions brokered –. Good news stories		leader in 'civic tech' (i.e. development of prototype)? How and to what extent has this mobilised community change/social action to address the crisis? What are the key economic, social and environmental impacts? What is the evidence of impacts on well-being? What is the economic value for City of Newcastle?	utilising a digital solution to nudge, engage and propel local behaviour.

Program	Evaluate	Key Research Questions	Proposed Method	Responsibilities	Impact Measures	Program Detail
		Unintended benefits and consequences	Short survey with GreenBe App users Economic evaluation - analysis of dollars generated			
Local Online Training Programs	Yes	% Take-up/promotion Rate of completion Barriers to take-up/completion Subscriber satisfaction with course content and delivery? How many have seen identifiable benefits? (accreditation, skills gained, improved business acumen)	Online survey Semi-structured interviews Good news stories	Anthea/Kris	Upskilling of local small business network e.g. level of accreditation achieved Support for community wellbeing # Participants considering extending education/training Participating businesses are better able to recover/manage disruption/handle organisational	CN supporting local small business (<20 employees) to put themselves and their staff through professional development training. Courses are offered by Registered Training Organisations

Program	Evaluate	Key Research Questions	Proposed Method	Responsibilities	Impact Measures	Program Detail
					change e.g. skills uptake Return on Investment	