

Evaluation of Rebuilding the Career Ladder Supporting business to enhance youth inclusion and economic mobility

Jo Ingold, Angela Knox and Qian Yi Lee
Initial Report – January 2023





THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Evaluation of Rebuilding the Career Ladder Initial Report – January 2023

ABSTRACT

Deakin Business School and University of Sydney Business School were commissioned by Social Ventures Australia to evaluate the effectiveness of their first 'Employer Innovation Lab'. This Lab was directed towards rebuilding the career ladder by supporting businesses to enhance youth inclusion and economic mobility. Based on participant observation, content analysis of relevant Lab documentation and interviews with the participating organisations, the evaluation strongly endorses the structure, process and content of the Lab. Participating organisations particularly valued the coaching component of the Lab and the opportunity to hear from young people about their lived experiences of employment and searching for work. The report provides interim outcomes from organisations' pilot projects and provides a series of recommendations for future iterations of the Lab

Report authors:

Jo Ingold is an Associate Professor at Deakin Business School
Angela Knox is an Associate Professor at University of Sydney
Qian Yi Lee is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at Deakin Business School

Cite this report as:

Ingold, J, Knox, A, Lee, QL (2023) Evaluation of Rebuilding the Career Ladder: Supporting business to enhance youth inclusion and economic mobility, Sydney: Social Ventures Australia

1. Background

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) received philanthropic funding to facilitate Australia's first 'Employer Innovation Lab' ('the Lab') using an innovative model designed and delivered with success in the US by Talent Rewire. The Lab's objective was to work with employers to improve employment pathways for young people in Western Sydney.

This report presents findings from the evaluation of Round One of the Employer Innovation Lab.

2. Introduction

2.1 Young people's labour market exclusion

Young people are increasingly experiencing entrenched inequality and disadvantage that stems from poor job opportunities and broken career ladders. These experiences negatively impact social mobility and create broader societal problems. In response to these persistent, unresolved issues, Social Ventures Australia adapted and piloted the Lab based on a model created and delivered in the US by Talent Rewire¹.

Youth unemployment is a continuing challenge globally. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Australian unemployment rate was at 3.5% overall, whereas the youth unemployment rate was at 7.6% in December 2022². In comparison, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) area youth unemployment rate was at 11.3% in January 2022³. In May 2019, 8.4% of youths were considered not in education, employment or training (NEET); by May 2020, the number increased to 12%⁴. In particular, young people with low educational attainment struggle with unemployment and under-employment (Productivity Commission, 2020)⁵.

At the time of SVA's first SVA's Employer Innovation Lab (June 2022), there were over 16,500 young people actively looking for work across Western and South Western Sydney. Many of the young people in this region have experienced long periods of economic insecurity. They are also among those who have been impacted most by the pandemic. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data reveal that youth unemployment is significantly higher in Western Sydney than other regions – Parramatta (15.8%), Blacktown (15.4%) vs Eastern Suburbs (7.2%), Sutherland Shire (4.5%)⁶. For those young people in work, wages have stagnated and there are fewer opportunities for career advancement and economic mobility.

Research by Macquarie University, commissioned by SVA to inform the Lab, revealed significant challenges associated with young people's work experiences in Western Sydney. For example, lack of access to transport inhibits access to many jobs, particularly where these involved shift work or short notice. It was also found that 30% of respondents had caring responsibilities, affecting their job choice, flexibility and availability to work. Young people also found it difficult to commit to study when they were not in steady work. Many found insecure work exhausting – constantly searching for work, starting new jobs and/or navigating new workplaces. Many reported a lack of training and poor treatment. Importantly, there is a reliance on high degrees of personal resilience for young people to be successful.

¹ <https://www.talentrewire.org>

² <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release#:~:text=Unemployment-,In%20trend%20terms%2C%20in%20December%202022%3A,unemployment%20rate%20decreased%20to%207.6%25.>

³ <https://www.oecd.org/newsroom/unemployment-rates-oecd-update-march-2022.htm>

⁴ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/engagement-in-education-or-employment#how-many>

⁵ <https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/What-Will-It-Take-youth-employment-report.pdf>

⁶ ABS Labour Force, Australia, May 2022, seasonally adjusted data. The working age population is original data, May 2022.

2.2 The business challenge

In addition to the challenges faced by young people, especially in Western Sydney, many businesses are experiencing systemic labour market problems, including significant labour and skill shortages, along with recruitment and retention issues. To identify the specific issues faced by businesses participating in SVA's Lab, employers completed an employer profile and self-assessment survey, which focused on their greatest challenges and needs.

The survey results indicated that for at least half of the Round One employers who completed the survey, the workforce challenges that they identified most strongly with (i.e. 'strongly agree') were around *attracting enough applicants for jobs* (5) and *filling roles that require specialist skills or knowledge* (4). Other workforce challenges that they 'strongly agreed' with included *employee retention* (3), *expected/actual loss of skilled employees* (3), *absenteeism* (2), *poor productivity* (2), *lack of workforce diversity* (2), *delivering on diversity targets or commitments* (2), and *increasing number of employees with mental health conditions* (2).

2.3 The context of Western Sydney

The Greater Western Sydney (GWS) region is on the lands of the Eora nation. GWS is located in Sydney's west and includes 13 local government areas (e.g. Blacktown City, the City of Parramatta, The Hills Shire etc.) and suburbs including Liverpool and Granville. The Greater Western Sydney population is very diverse, with residents from more than 170 countries and speaking over 100 different languages. In 2021, the estimated resident population was 2,620,162⁷. The majority of new migrants (60%) that arrive in Australia settle in Greater Western Sydney and over the past decade 50% of these arrivals were from Iraq and Sudan. GWS' Indigenous population is also greater than that of the rest of Sydney. Around 12% of Greater Western Sydney residents do not have proficiency in English language. Although the region is the third largest economy in the country behind Sydney CBD and Melbourne, Greater Western Sydney has higher than average unemployment and lower than average salary levels⁸. According to labour force data, the youth unemployment rate for Sydney South West was 9.7% compared with 7.7% for Australia⁹.

⁷ <https://profile.id.com.au/cws>

⁸ https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/rcegws/rcegws/About/about_greater_western_sydney

⁹ <https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/regions/all-regions-abs-sa4/?region=Sydney+-+South+West>

3. Employer Innovation Lab

3.1 The Employer Innovation Lab process

The Employer Innovation Lab process comprised initial workshops for employers (the “Lab Workshop”) followed by approximately 10-15 hours of coaching support delivered by SVA over several months.

The Lab program was provided at no cost to the participating organisations. However organisations participating in the Lab were expected to commit to attending all of the Lab sessions and they were expected to:

1. Assign appropriate staff to participate in the Lab (ideally 2-3 staff from human resources, CSR (where relevant) and operations);
2. Attend the Lab and develop a Pilot program to address a recruitment, retention or career progression problem confronting their organisation and their target cohort(s);
3. Implement their Pilot Program to affect change within their organisation and track progress.

Prior to participating in the Lab, organisations were asked to complete a diagnostic survey, which provided a baseline measure of their inclusive employment practices. In the survey, organisations identified the key issues faced with respect to recruitment, retention and employee career progression challenges, as outlined above.

The Lab Workshop was designed to provide an interactive applied learning experience to create and optimise inclusive transformational change for the organisation and community. During the Lab workshop, organisations were challenged to develop a vision for their own workforce, which included developing a pilot for their organisation to improve opportunities for young people and meet business and social needs.

An important part of the Lab Workshop was the inclusion of young people from Western Sydney as ‘youth consultants’. Participating organisations had the opportunity to speak with these young people and ask about their experiences of seeking and being in employment, as well as to seek their advice about their organisational challenges (recruitment, retention etc).

In total, there were three Lab Workshop sessions. The first was a full-day in-person workshop that involved learning about external social structures that drive inequality and introduced thinking about systems change. This was followed by discussion around some of the workforce challenges faced by each company. Participants then began to design a pilot for their organisation that could help to overcome some of these challenges while at the same time creating opportunities for social mobility for young people in the region.

The second session was a half-day in-person workshop that involved: 1) getting peer feedback by revisiting organisational challenges and aspirations; 2) the opportunity to ask questions and test their assumptions with young people themselves; 3) refining their pilot designs by bringing together ideas and input from both their group of peers and young people.

The third session was a half-day in-person workshop that involved 1) measuring and demonstrating impact, 2) group sharing of experiences, and 3) discussing the paths to individual and collective success.

Coaching sessions with participants from each organisation took place between the two half-day sessions and have continued since. Lab participants were brought back together to report on progress and learnings six months after the initial workshop.

4. Employers' experiences of the Lab

In the three months following the first Lab workshop, interviews were conducted with participating employers in order to evaluate SVA's pilot program and develop recommendations for future Labs. Seven of the eight organisations that were part of the Lab's first round participated in the interviews (see Appendix for details of the participating organisations). The interview themes included: expectations, most powerful aspects, benefits and limitations, social impact, coaching, and outcomes. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and the content was recorded and transcribed in full. On average, each interview lasted around 30 minutes. Overwhelmingly, participants' perceptions of the Lab were extremely positive. Participant quotes included in the remainder of this report have been anonymised.

4.1 Expectations of the Lab

Overall, interviewees indicated that they understood what to expect in terms of the aims and content of the Lab. Most interviewees were aware of the Lab's aims and they felt comfortable with their own expectations regarding the content of the Lab. However, a few interviewees were less certain, stating that they did not know what to expect from the Lab or that the Lab was different from their expectations. For example, one participant noted that:

we walked into the lab not knowing really what it was about. Like what it actually turned out to be and what I was thinking it was going to be were pretty much two different things... I thought it was going to be more about the way we advertise and bring people on and sort of focusing on the young people. Didn't realise it was those that are a little bit more vulnerable in the community

Organisation 2

Another participant recalled:

I personally did not know what to expect and I ... thought it was just going to be them giving us the answers, but it was quite the opposite

Organisation 1

That participants were not given the answers but engaged in an ongoing process of peer-to-peer learning was a significant benefit of the Lab.

4.1 Perceptions of the Lab process

All interviewees spoke very positively about the Lab. Interviewees felt that the structure and process of the Lab were powerful, allowing participants to carve out space to engage, reflect, and possibly re-think their existing strategies and focus on improving their policies and practices. In particular, the full-day offsite structure of the Lab was perceived as beneficial as it enabled participants to dedicate their attention to the Lab:

probably the powerful thing is the way that it was structured in terms of the workshops probably made it more powerful in terms of it was a full day offsite. I know that me... [and my colleagues] would talk about having that in our schedules really helped give it a hundred percent focus. Whereas if it was a two hour zoom workshop every week, it wouldn't have been as powerful... I remember it very much being about understanding the scope of young people in Australia and the barriers that exist for them to gain employment. And then moving on to the following week, it was like we were talking about, well what are the structures in our business that are limiting accessing these people?

Organisation 3

The scaffolded structure of the Lab was also noted as important as it allowed participants to understand the wider context and challenges related to youth unemployment before beginning to explore their own organisation's context and challenges:

I think the way they did it was very effective. They didn't slam you with that first up telling you that we've got a blank sheet of paper here, go for it. It was sort of a gradual, yeah, it was good. A very good process.

Organisation 1

The first aspect of this was that participants preconceived ideas were challenged and they became aware of a pool of under-leveraged and overlooked talent (DCA/Jobbank 2022)¹⁰:

it's probably been having someone outside the business to challenge my thinking and to encourage some different takes on things and doing things differently. So having that sort of coach to challenge the thinking has been good

Organisation 5

¹⁰<https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/inclusive-recruitment-work>

A second element was that participants felt supported and they valued SVAs high-level involvement in the process:

the standout thing for me was I feel like there was work being done on both sides. It wasn't just them pitching us an idea and then saying, Okay, go away, talk to your teams and do it. I really feel like when we've needed anything, they've come back with help to help us facilitate that. The workshops were really organised and they clearly had clear outcomes of where we were going to get to by the end of it. So I just feel like it was, work was expected and completed from both us and SVA, which I thought really showed that they were invested in all of the different organisations that were participating, having a pilot launch that made sense for their business.

Organisation 3

The third critical element of the Lab process was that organisations were guided to develop solutions to better manage their organisational challenges as a result of the information and connections provided by SVA:

I think with the lab there's actually people there who understand the youth and that they can guide you through that and give you more meaningful information that can help you sort of see a different perspective. I think if I was just to like go by myself and have this idea I wouldn't really necessarily know where to begin... they have connections with so many different service providers and all that I think that that helps because then it's like if you have an idea they've actually got a way for you to get things moving rather than you just having an idea and then nothing coming in from it.

Organisation 4

As noted by one participant, the guidance provided by SVA enhanced their professional development. It enabled them to understand the challenges facing their business and develop actionable solutions:

... it wasn't a hand holding exercise. It was more of a guidance, which I think was good because it was good for both of our professional development as well to be able to firstly start within a gap analysis of what we needed to do, listing out everything that were problematic, addressing them, and then putting actions in. So, it was breaking it down, again which neither of us usually make time for.

Organisation 7

A further powerful aspect was the duration of engagement with SVA over weeks and months, fostering time for reflection but also holding organisations accountable:

it's given us a timeline and pushed us forward and it's not something that we've just said we want to do and never got to. It's made it a priority and it's helped us achieve it... from our point of view, we knew that there was problems and but "there wasn't really a lot that we could do", I suppose, was, you know, the excuse we probably did. And I just think that the lab sort of gave the opportunity to say, "Okay, so what can we do as a company?"

Organisation 1

Such accountability arose from the creation and ownership of the project by the organisations themselves:

having it as a project or as something that the business is aware that is happening means that people want an update which means it gets progressed forward and this particular project actually sits on, sits our sustainability program under diversity and inclusion and so we have a monthly update with the [leadership team] and it's on there so people are like, what is it? What's the update? It's sponsored by someone in the leadership team, the Australian leadership team. So there's almost like an incentive to keep it going. I think having this particular program or the workshops meant that there was no need to build a case for why this project should exist that was already done and then it's just there and now it's asking the question of okay well how are we going to execute on the project rather than should we do the project?

Organisation 3

Importantly, organisations participating in the Lab were curated by SVA to ensure that there were no direct competitors. This, together with the structure, was viewed as contributing to an environment that facilitated peer learning. Participants benefited from the context of being with and learning from peers. This was powerful in highlighting to participants that they were not alone in experiencing problems relating to recruitment and retention:

So it was interesting to hear the challenges that each business faces employing young people, for me, because I haven't been in a recruitment sort of role for a very long time... gave us a chance to network with other businesses that have mostly faced similar challenges, but in different environments and tackling those challenges in a different way. So it was great to be able to share that in that collegiate environment there. Also makes feel like we're not alone out there facing those challenges, that actually the whole industry's facing with these skill and employee shortages there.

Organisation 5

A small number of interviewees highlighted aspects of the Lab that could be articulated more strongly to better aid their preparation and maximise their Lab experience, and/or more effectively measure the impact of their pilot. Illustratively, one participant indicated that they would have preferred to be provided with more information about the Lab and what it would entail so that they could have prepared better. They felt that having to brainstorm on the spot and come up with something actionable was quite stressful and may not produce the best possible ideas or solutions.

In addition, participants from two other organisations explained that additional information and greater understanding regarding measures and metrics that could help them evaluate the impact and value of the changes implemented would be very useful.

Several participants highlighted that it would have been beneficial to have more time over the course of the Lab to hear more from other participants and be able to share ideas amongst the group. A number of interviewees talked about the benefits of being able to listen to the experiences and perspectives of other participating organisations despite not being from the same industry. It was reassuring to see that similar issues were being faced by others and that they were not alone. There was also value in being able to share and brainstorm in a 'collegiate environment' to aid peer learning and test ideas.

4.3 Coaching

Coaching was a key component of the Lab beyond the three workshops delivered. The coaching was viewed by participants as particularly impactful; six participating organisations spoke specifically about this element. Overall, they indicated that the coaching provided guidance and support that helped the organisations to develop their pilots. The key benefits of the coaching were thought to involve: (i) keeping organisations accountable and maintaining momentum; (ii) providing a personalised element to the Lab; (iii) acting as a catalyst for change, as outlined below.

Many interviewees expressed that the coaching sessions kept them accountable as the sessions gave them a schedule to adhere to and provided encouragement, as well as challenge when needed:

the coaching, you know, the dates give us a deadline to work to have the next step of work done there.

Organisation 5

it's just a matter of them keeping us on schedule as well with the coaching sessions and checking up on us. I think it was once a week or once every fortnight just so that we were going somewhere and we weren't just static

Organisation 1

I think the benefit of those one-on-one ones was very personalised as well versus the workshops which were a bit more general trying to keep everyone kind of going... I think the coaching sessions have also been quite good. They've been tailored to specifics for [us] and it's allowed us to ask questions and get the answers and get that guidance that we need to make this all a reality

Organisation 3

I think it just keeps us in check and I think it just keeps us on the journey, to be honest. We're all very, very busy... So, I think it's pretty normal for someone at [...] to have three – even though we've got our job titles we've definitely got about three or four roles within our job so I think – yeah, it's just been really good. Simon and Susie really are so knowledgeable, so passionate and both just bounce off each other and balance each other out. So, they definitely keep us engaged... I think they're encouraging... It's very like if we didn't have those coaching sessions and Susie and Simon to be like you're doing good work then I feel like it would be a little bit harder to push ourselves along and get it going

Organisation 6

Two interviewees added that the coaching sessions really challenged them to explore different ideas and opened their mind to alternative thinking. The ability to bounce ideas off each other and with an external party to the organisation was very valuable in the development and streamlining of their pilot program.

The coaching sessions were viewed as a catalyst for the ideas developed as participants' notions were challenged and questioned. This provided a framework on which to design a robust pilot that would best fit with (i) the organisations' current practices and (ii) benefit both the organisation and young people. One of the organisations found a partner to connect with from the coaching sessions to help in their pilot project. Participants' comments regarding coaching were overwhelmingly positive:

they act as a catalyst for, I mean we produce the ideas but they act as a catalyst to make those ideas basically.

Organisation 1

I really rate her and I think that she asks really good questions that make you think, is this actually the best way? And also likewise, she'll give feedback and answer our questions of is this doing what we're intending? So even, for example, we were going to do the pilot with one person and her feedback was like you should probably do it with two or more because then they have a friend and they have someone that's going through the same thing. And also, if you're going to be putting all these resources towards this person, you might as well just get a little bit of scale there and what if they drop out? And just little things that from our perspective we probably wouldn't have thought of.

Organisation 3

I felt very supported and guided throughout that whole thought process because especially as I said, when I came into it I was quite closed off so it's really allowed me to just open my mindset a bit more and explore different ideas. I think during the coaching sessions they sort of prompted me to think about the things that I wouldn't necessarily think about.

Organisation 4

during the coaching session to receive that feedback, be challenged on ideas, have new ideas suggested to us, I think that whole process works well.

Organisation 5

4.4 Understanding the perspectives of young people

A critical component of the Lab mentioned by all interviewees was the opportunity it provided to understand the diversity of lived experiences of young people themselves. This occurred from the start of the Lab with the scene-setting provided through labour market statistics and findings from SVAs commissioned interview research along with offering participants the opportunity to engage with young people themselves as 'youth consultants'. The data were viewed as important in providing evidence on which to base their pilot ideas and to use in their own organisational context:

... actually having those facts and figures put in front of us I think was really important. Because that's also really important for us to take that back to our members that we work with, so the employers that we work with to basically say, look, we're not lying. This what's really happening out there.

Organisation 6

Interviewees found the opportunity to meet with young people eye-opening as it revealed the extent and nature of the challenges and issues faced by young people seeking employment:

it's been an eye-opening experience. Especially at the start with the initial workshop days when they started going through the statistics and all that. You see that there's a greater good to this whole cause than just simply bringing on some employees and giving them a shot. I think the overall goal is much bigger than just simply the benefits of the company as well. So it's a win-win.

Organisation 1

it kind of opened our eyes up too to what we can do to make a difference as well and what we can do better in our business

Organisation 7

Some interviewees admitted that they had preconceived notions of young people based on their own experiences or biases and did not realise that there were constraints limiting young people in their employment journey. Although the actual outcomes are yet to reach fruition, the Lab has provided organisations with supported opportunities to create meaningful changes for their business and the young people of Western Sydney. One interviewee highlighted how hearing the perspectives of young people had allowed them to understand how the current context is both challenging and different from their own experiences:

I didn't realise how hard it is for a young person to approach a company or get a job at a company these days. When I was younger it seemed a lot more easier. You know, you were physically handing out your resumes to different companies, whether it's retail, hospitality, even office administration. But now it just seems so much harder these days

Organisation 1

Another interviewee highlighted the mental health problems experienced by some young people and the importance of recognising the role that work can play in improving young people's mental health:

The other thing that I found really interesting and really valuable was bringing the youth in to have a chat to us about their expectations and about their experience in the workforce or why they're looking for work. So, and there were a few challenges there that I think, you know, as a mum with a 22-year-old that sort of finished uni, was lucky enough to find employment straight away – and we live in Western Sydney, so we live in the Blacktown area, Blacktown local government area, but there were a whole lot of other challenges I sort of didn't realise existed. So it was interesting to hear those challenges. With the young people, how much mental health played a role in that, that they're very in touch with their mental health and what they needed to work in a position and keep that healthy mental state

Organisation 5

The same participant also noted that hearing about the experiences of young people allowed them to recognise the importance of providing structured learning and development opportunities:

I think the other thing that's helped me with that youth perspective is talking to those young people at that third workshop day, one thing that came through for me is they said they've been thrown into this job – so they're in retail jobs, so a bit different to our sectors, but they'd had multiple experiences where they say, "You've started the job today, here you go, you're on the cash register," and there's no training for them. And they felt really exposed by that and uncomfortable with it. And so, I think it helped me to I guess appreciate again the importance of the work that we do in providing a job that has a structured learning plan attached to it. It's designed for entry level workers. So I think it helped us to understand that that is still relevant and that can help address that need, these young people saying, "We want to start a job and we want to be supported by it and have a purpose to it." And that's exactly what apprenticeships and traineeships are there for.

Organisation 5

Having the opportunity meet with young people was also a catalyst for change of mindset, encouraging participants to think differently about how qualifications, skills and experience were considered in their own organisations. There was an acknowledgement from interviewees of the broader systemic problems impacting young people and that it is not the young people who are the problem. Simply because young people lack experience, it does not mean that they cannot work. Participants came to realise that there are transferrable skills that are not unique to having a university education:

I think the most powerful part of the lab process was probably just hearing different perspectives and actually meeting with the youth. Because I think when I went into the lab the first time I was very not open minded, I'd say. Because I was like sitting there, they were talking about all these cool things that we could do to attract more youth and look beyond that just university degree, like that talent pool. I was just thinking how is that even possible? Right? And then as it went on and you heard more perspectives and the opportunity to actually meet with these youth I was then – the change in mindset came where I was like, no, actually this is possible. Why are we not looking to tap into this sort of talent pool? Just because they haven't gone to university it doesn't really change the transferable skills that they would bring. I think that aspect was really powerful for me because it just allowed me to change my mindset and actually have a more open mind about what we can actually do and then get creative about it

Organisation 4

4.5 Contact with employment services, education and training providers

An important part of the ecosystem related to youth inclusion and economic mobility is a range of employment, education and training providers, such as government-funded employment services, post-compulsory education and training e.g. Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) providers. Interviewees were asked about their prior or existing contact with employment services providers and/or organisations such as RTOs and TAFEs. Most organisations had little, if any, contact, as illustrated below:

No, not a lot. We have guys that do, that go to TAFE but I must admit we don't have a lot of contact with them. Their direct supervisors because they went to TAFE may ring up and see how they're going. Or TAFE may put a complaint in if they've got someone who isn't attending. But very minimal.

Organisation 1

So for me, very little. So we use labour hire for ...not so much recruitment but in terms of to get labour in where we have gaps. But no, definitely for me personally, very little.

Organisation 3

I don't think we had a lot of contact. I think it was just a bit earlier than this Lab started that a team in – my counterparts in Melbourne, they had started reaching out to TAFE just to see what pathways that we could arrange.

Organisation 4

For some interviewees, the Lab had made them aware of the employment service providers and other organisations available. One interviewee elaborated that SVA's connections with multiple different service providers was extremely helpful because it can facilitate connections that could benefit their organisation. Some of them had already made contact and others are planning to contact the relevant service providers or are researching different groups to narrow down which ones would work with them. Others have worked with specific providers and will continue to do so after the Lab:

With TAFE, we're heavily involved. At the moment, probably by the end of the year, we'll have 27 apprentices. We normally run with anywhere between 10 to 20 apprentices, depending on what's happening. We worked with the TAFE in different areas for many years. We are currently working with TAFE at the moment in regards to developing a pre-apprenticeship program... TAFE, we've been in TAFE, but no one else.

Organisation 2

As a result of the Lab, one participant indicated that their organisation was now pursuing relationships with partners after little success in the past. They had benefited from SVAs connections with partners along with their guidance and support to help build a more successful partnership:

We have contact with organisations like TAFE because of the industry that we work in. However, none of the initiatives have been successful just due to funding or just lack of process, because the transport industry is constantly trying to get young workers into the industry there's always new initiatives, but not all of them have been successful. In terms of the providers we didn't have any contact... last week I did have a meeting with the provider and organisations like TAFE we've been liaising with as well. So, we're hoping to get something running in October provided we have time to do it... it's been facilitated again by Social Ventures where it's actually – they're asking the right questions from us and from TAFE to make sure it is successful. Same with the providers as well. Previously when we have trialled these things I think there wasn't – again, it was just going back to the process, there wasn't enough process to get it done.

Organisation 7

Other interviewees had had prior contact with employment services, training or education providers but post-Lab were considering establishing relationships with other partners. For one organisation, an important aspect of the Lab involved understanding the challenges faced by job candidates (or jobseekers) prior to contacting, or working with, providers:

So we're probably like everybody else, we have positions there, we need to fill them. So we need – this very important to us because we need to know why we can't fill those positions and what the people of today would like or need. So I feel like it's sort of employment's gone sort of a bit of full circle and it's more like the person applying for a position can say, "Well, you know, what can you offer me?" Rather than it be the company saying, "This is what we've got to offer." So, yeah, I think it's really an employee's market at the moment... we haven't really changed since the workshop. I'm curious to see if we can find some of those Commonwealth funded providers that will work with us. Some of that comes down to a lot about the individual staff and those offices. So if we're going to find some I'd be happy to work with, but we'll see how we go matchmaking.

Organisation 5

Another participant highlighted the wide range of providers available, suggesting that additional information and guidance would enable them to develop a more targeted approach:

I have quite a large network of transition to work providers that I've worked with as well as registered training organisations and different community groups... So that's something that we've been working on, trying to actually engage with those specific groups as opposed to just your transition to work, youth employment agencies and things like that. We do a lot with the schools as well but that's just the nature of our business... I've been starting to research different groups. I haven't directly reached out to a lot of them as yet and that's mainly because there is a lot of groups out there so just trying to narrow down which ones will work with us. I did engage with one group called Talent Rise and I've started to work with them just sending them through vacancies that we have and things like that.

Organisation 6

Relatedly, the value of coaching was mentioned once again as a useful means of informing and connecting organisations with partners in order to implement their pilot.

I think with the coaching with Susie, we've managed to find a partner to connect with. So with [OCTEC] she's also helped us firm up our plan and I guess, guide. So we really did come up with the plan ourselves but just kind of guided us in the right direction. Yeah, I think it worked quite well.

Organisation 3

4.6 The Lab pilot projects and interim outcomes

At the time of the Round One interviews, the pilot projects were in varying stages of implementation. Most organisations had created a plan for when they were going to start their pilot and its expected duration. Organisations planned starting dates were as follows: September 2022 (2), October 2022 (1), November 2022 (1), January/February 2023 (2). Thus, organisations had made various levels of progress, but none had reached completion.

The pilots were as follows:

1. Attraction, work experience and pathway to ongoing employment;
2. Attraction, work exposure, work experience, onboarding and ongoing employment focused on internal practice change
3. Attraction, recruitment and advancement to redesign role types to create genuine entry-level pathways
4. Attraction, recruitment, development and retention pilot to create access to entry-level roles in consultation with local young people
5. Onboarding and retention to improve onboarding and pastoral support
6. Attraction, recruitment, retention and influence guild to improve practice and utilise existing and new partnerships to create pathways for underrepresented groups of young people
7. Attraction, recruitment, development and retention to improve internal practices and provide training for supervisors

One participant explained that following the commencement of their pilot project, they had achieved 30% progress toward their goal of encouraging young people into industry jobs with a focus on diversity and disengaged youth:

when I think about it we're probably at that 30% mark I'd say. So, there's still a long way to go. We're kind of measuring it that around this time next year we will have kind of a better retention rate in place, a more diverse cohort, and also for our members to have a diverse cohort of workers and things like that as well. We want to kind of share our journey as we go, so the plan was good news stories, we've got the [...] Awards coming up in October and looking at the nominations of the apprentices and trainees that have been put forward, it's great to see there is quite a diverse range of candidates in that group and also educational pieces as well to our membership. So, really telling them how it is and what it is, and if they don't change they're not going to have anyone essentially.

Organisation 6

Although none of the organisations had completed their pilots, several participants highlighted that the Lab process had created valuable team building opportunities and outcomes. Interviewees talked about the Lab providing them with opportunities for team building where participants from the same organisation were able to come together (sometimes from different functions) to take part in the program and work on the pilot. One organisation built on that further by taking the information and learnings from the Lab back to the workplace and sharing them with others, further enhancing team building along with learning and development opportunities:

I like the way that it's enabled, I think, that team building between [my colleague] and I as a manager and employee, but then for us now that team building to share that back through our team, which then strengthens us to be able to provide what we need for the youths. So that's been, I think, a big advantage of this project as well.

Organisation 5

4.7 Limitations of the Lab

Importantly, there were not seen to be any disadvantages associated with the Lab aside from the commitment of resources, largely in the form of time.

I think there's no disadvantages, there's no major costs, as [my colleague] said, apart from time

Organisation 5

Any other limitations that were noted were related to their organisation or the participant's circumstances or role rather than the Lab itself:

I don't think from my end I wouldn't say that I've seen it as a disadvantage. I think more so in our day-to-day roles we tend to get caught up and I think it's more so just putting that time aside and making sure that we are focusing on the project and we are progressing and as [my colleague] said, the fact that it is talked about monthly and we're expected to provide updates, it keeps us accountable.

Organisation 3

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Overwhelmingly, the participants interviewed endorsed the Lab, emphasising that it challenged their preconceived ideas as well as their existing policies and practices with respect to recruitment and retention. In doing so, the Lab positively transformed their attitudes toward young people and created a catalyst to develop policies and practices capable of delivering more sustainable win-win outcomes along with the knowledge and support required to achieve those outcomes. Based on our analysis of SVA's pilot Lab program, including the interview data from participants, we have developed a series of recommendations directed toward ensuring the success of future Labs conducted by SVA:

- 1. Existing information provided to Lab participants prior to the commencement of the Lab process was largely effective and endorsed by those interviewed. However, a small number of participants felt that the Lab's aims and content could be articulated more fully in order to allow them to prepare for the Lab more effectively. The development and provision of a more detailed information sheet supplemented with tips from previous participants would be useful for future iterations of the Lab.*
- 2. Selecting participating organisations on the basis that they were not in competition with each other was valued by participants as it was thought to contribute to the collegial environment that fostered the supportive and trusting exchange of information and feedback throughout the Lab. This selection strategy should be retained in future iterations of the Lab.*
- 3. The structure, process and content of the Lab were strongly endorsed by participants. In particular, the Lab's full-day offsite structure was valued along with its scaffolded and clearly structured content. The overarching structure, process and content of the Lab should therefore be retained.*
- 4. All participants indicated that the data regarding young people's employment and challenges faced along with the integration of youth consultants' lived experiences were critical. These aspects of the Lab transformed participants' attitudes and fundamentally shaped the development of their pilot programs. These aspects of the Lab should therefore be retained.*
- 5. Several participants felt that the exchange of information and feedback between participants benefited their progression and the development of their pilot programs. To this extent, they suggested that such opportunities could be expanded further. Future Labs could integrate additional networking opportunities either within the existing structure or through the provision of supplementary, optional networking sessions, which might continue through the coaching period.*
- 6. Some participants expressed a need for additional content related to the use of metrics and measures. The integration of additional content could focus on specific metrics and measures, such as the use of turnover rates and return on investment, including worked examples to improve participants' knowledge and understanding, and ease some of the uncertainty expressed.*
- 7. Information and support regarding employment services, education and training providers was endorsed by participants as it enabled many to engage such providers when they had not done so previously or had limited success previously. Such information and support should be retained in future iterations of the Lab.*
- 8. The coaching component of the Lab was highly valued by participants and should be retained in its existing format. In particular, the interviewees highlighted the importance of the support and guidance provided on a one-on-one basis. Participants also benefited from the often-challenging nature of their coaching sessions, which facilitated the development of pilot programs more inclined to succeed. The coaching sessions also maintained momentum and created accountability, which will also contribute to the success of their pilot programs.*

Appendix

Summary of Participating Organisations

Consep	global engineering company based in Australia providing engineering solutions to the mining, construction, water and wastewater industries.
Daikin	global air conditioning manufacturing company headquartered in Japan.
Goodman Fielder	Australian manufacture, marketer and distributor of bread and other foods and ingredients.
KPMG	a global professional services network providing audit, tax and advisory services.
My Gateway	Group Training Organisation employing apprentices and trainees and places them with a host business to receive training in their chosen industry.
TABMA	Group Training Organisation, part of a member-based industry association representing timber and building materials merchants and suppliers, timber importers, fabricators and service providers.
Vellex	large, family-owned and operated business providing national freight distribution and logistics solutions across Eastern Australia.



This evaluation was commissioned by Social Ventures Australia as part of SVA's Rebuilding the Career Ladder Initiative.



SVA would like to acknowledge that the Employer Innovation Lab has been adapted from the model created by Talent Rewire and thank them for their ongoing support.

Citi Foundation



SVA acknowledges Citi Foundation's generous financial support and its critical role as the founding partner in this initiative and the partner of this report.



SVA also acknowledges the ongoing support of the Macquarie Group Foundation for SVA's work in supporting better pathways into skilled employment for young people.

Social Ventures Australia
Brisbane | Darwin | Melbourne | Perth | Sydney | ABN 94 100 487 572 | AFSL 428 865
info@socialventures.com.au | socialventures.com.au | @Social_Ventures

