The economic impact of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery / Len Lye Centre

New Plymouth District Council
Govett-Brewster Foundation
Len Lye Foundation

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THE LEN LYE FOUNDATION

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Govett-Brewster Art Gallery / Len Lye Centre economic impact summary (2024–25)

Visitor numbers

~79,000 total visitors, with nearly 1 in 4 from outside New Plymouth

Visitor spending

$10.8 million in non-local visitor expenditure

Operating costs

$5.6 million

Total direct economic impact

$16.4 million

Total economic impact

$24.8 million incl. indirect/induced

GDP contribution

$13.7 million

Employment supported

153 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs

Return on investment

Every $1 of council rates funding generated $2.73 in GDP

Executive summary

The Len Lye Centre (the Centre) is a cornerstone of New Plymouth's cultural and tourism landscape. This report, commissioned by the New Plymouth District Council, presents a comprehensive assessment of its economic, social, and cultural impact for the 2024–25 year, using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis with qualitative insights.

About 79,000 people visited the Centre, and nearly one in four came from outside the New Plymouth District. Combining the visitor spending of around $10.8 million with the Centre's own running costs, the total direct boost to the local economy was $16.4 million. Considering the wider economic effects that ripple out from this total direct boost means that the Centre helped generate $24.8 million in spending, added $13.7 million to the local economy (GDP), and supported 153 full-time jobs in the district.

Beyond the numbers, the Centre delivers substantial cultural and social value. Visitor surveys show high satisfaction levels and a strong Net Promoter Score of 65, indicating that the Centre is both well-regarded and widely recommended. Education programmes reached nearly 3,900 students, and community engagement grew through the Friends of the Gallery and the Govett-Brewster Foundation.

Qualitative interviews with nearby businesses reinforce the Centre's role as a unique anchor attraction. It enhances New Plymouth's identity as a vibrant arts destination, supports surrounding hospitality and accommodation providers, and has catalysed investment in the West End precinct. Businesses highlighted the Centre's integration into the broader tourism ecosystem and its influence on visitor behaviour, length of stay, and spending patterns.

Together, these findings demonstrate that the Len Lye Centre is not only a cultural institution but also a driver of regional development, with opportunities to further enhance its impact through strategic investment and deeper collaboration with local stakeholders.

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1 Introduction

The Len Lye Centre (the Centre) is a cornerstone of New Plymouth's cultural landscape and a key contributor to the region's tourism ecosystem. As a dedicated space for creativity and innovation, the Centre attracts a diverse range of visitors, both domestic and international, and plays a vital role in the economic vitality of the Taranaki region.

Business and Economic Research Limited (BERL) was commissioned by the New Plymouth District Council to undertake an economic impact assessment (EIA) of the Centre. The purpose of this report is to quantify the Centre's economic contributions and to explore its broader influence within the regional tourism ecosystem.

The research utilised a mixed-methods approach to assess the economic impact of the Len Lye Centre, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative insights. The methodology builds on internal datasets, including building entry data, visitor ticketing records, and visitor experience surveys, to estimate visitor volumes, segmentation, and associated spending.

These datasets are complemented by external tourism data, which help contextualise the Centre's role within the broader Taranaki tourism ecosystem. To enrich the analysis, three interviews were conducted with surrounding businesses, covering accommodation, food and beverage, and tour guides, to capture local perspectives on the Centre's influence.

This integrated approach enables a robust understanding of the Centre's contribution to regional economic activity and its position as an anchor cultural institution. The analysis aims to provide a comprehensive view of the Centre's current impact and its potential for future growth.

2 Impact on New Plymouth's tourism ecosystem

This section presents the findings of the economic impact assessment of the Len Lye Centre (the Centre), with a focus on its role within New Plymouth's tourism ecosystem. The Centre, dedicated to Len Lye's works, is essentially an extension of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (the Gallery) and opened in 2015 as part of the same institution. The Centre and the Gallery function together as a single contemporary art museum.

The analysis draws on both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the Centre's contribution to the local economy, its influence on visitor behaviour, and its broader cultural and social value. Sub-section 2.1 outlines the economic impact, including visitor profiles, spending patterns, and estimated contributions to GDP and employment. Sub-section 2.2 considers the Centre's cultural and social impact, highlighting its role in fostering creativity, engaging the community, and enhancing the visitor experience. Together, these findings provide a comprehensive view of the Centre's significance as an anchor institution in the region.

2.1 Economic impact

The economic impact analysis begins by outlining the Centre's visitor profile, including how many people it attracts and what proportion are local residents compared to out-of-town tourists. We examine visitor numbers and segmentation (locals versus non-locals) based on the Centre's own entry data and ticketing records, supplemented by visitor surveys for insights into origin and purpose of visit. Using these internal datasets, alongside external tourism data (such as regional visitor statistics), we then estimate visitor spending patterns, distinguishing between domestic visitors and international tourists, to understand how much each group spends in the local economy. Finally, we translate these figures into an estimated contribution to GDP and employment for New Plymouth, quantifying the injection of visitor expenditure attributable to the Centre and the number of local jobs supported by this spending. This provides a data-driven picture of the Centre's economic significance, from the makeup of its audience to the dollars and jobs it generates for the region.

2.1.1 Data sources

To determine the economic impact of the Centre in 2024-25, we used both internal (visitor surveys, ticket numbers, and expenditure) and external (tourism expenditure, accommodation, and international visitor surveys) datasets. Internal datasets provided by the Centre included:

- Annual visitor counts from 2009-10 (before the Centre opened in 2015) through to 2024-25. This data was only the pure counts of the total number of visitors to walk through the doors
- Monthly visitor surveys from June 2022 through to July 2025. These surveys provided key data on the share of visitors to the Centre by location, along with the number of visits per two years, as well as numerous other variables, such as demographic social impacts of visitors to the Centre. For the year to July 2025, there were a total of 407 respondents to the 12 monthly surveys over the year
- Annual operational expenditure of the Centre for the 2024-25 financial year, broken down by staff costs and other expenditure categories.

External datasets from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) included:

- Annual domestic and international expenditure within the Taranaki region for the latest available year (year to May 2025), by tourism expenditure categories
- International visitor survey dataset on tourists who travelled to the Taranaki region, those who also visited the Centre, and the expenditure of these international visitors in the Taranaki region
- Commercial accommodation data on the average number of nights spent in the Taranaki region for international and domestic visitors staying in commercial accommodation providers.

Combining these internal and external datasets enabled us to determine the total number of visitors to the Centre in 2024-25, by location of origin and total amount of visitor expenditure by expenditure category, as well as the total amount overall of economic activity generated in the Taranaki region by non-local visitors to the Len Lye Centre.

2.1.2 Visitors

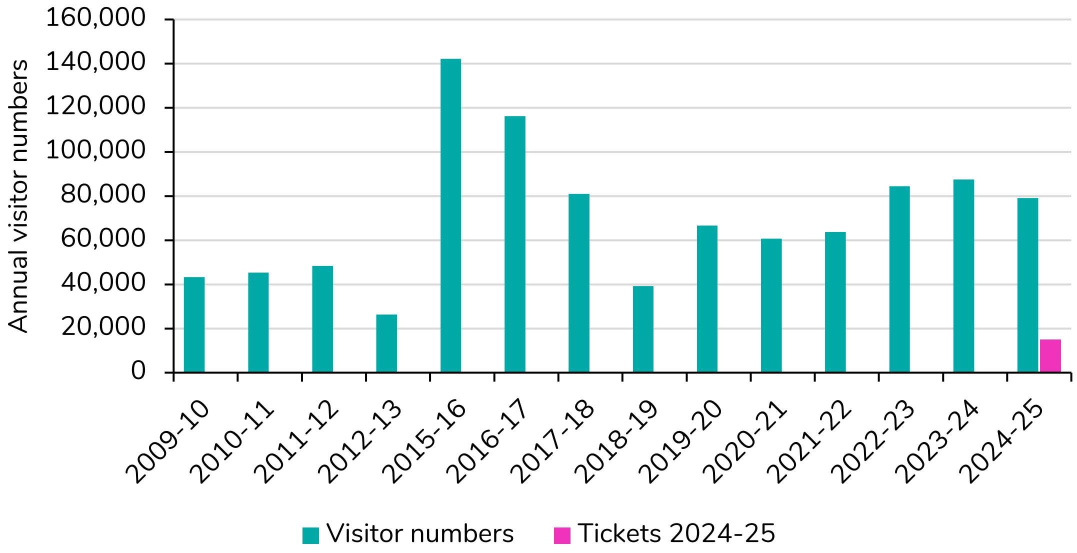
Prior to August 2018, all visitors to the Centre were able to enter and visit the Centre free of charge; this was changed in August 2018. Since this date, visitors from outside the New Plymouth District have been charged an entry fee, with the current fee structure as follows:

- Seniors (65+) and Students (16+) are charged $12

- Under-16s and Friends of the Gallery are not charged
- All other visitors are charged $17.

The total number of visitors to the Centre peaked in 2015-16 at around 116,200 before falling to its lowest level in 2018-19 at just 39,250 with the introduction of the ticket charges (Figure 1). Since then visitor numbers have recovered, with around 79,150 people visiting the Centre in 2024-25. In addition to the visitor numbers, the Centre was able to provide total ticket numbers for the 2024-25 year, in which, as shown in Figure 1, just under 15,000 entry tickets were purchased.

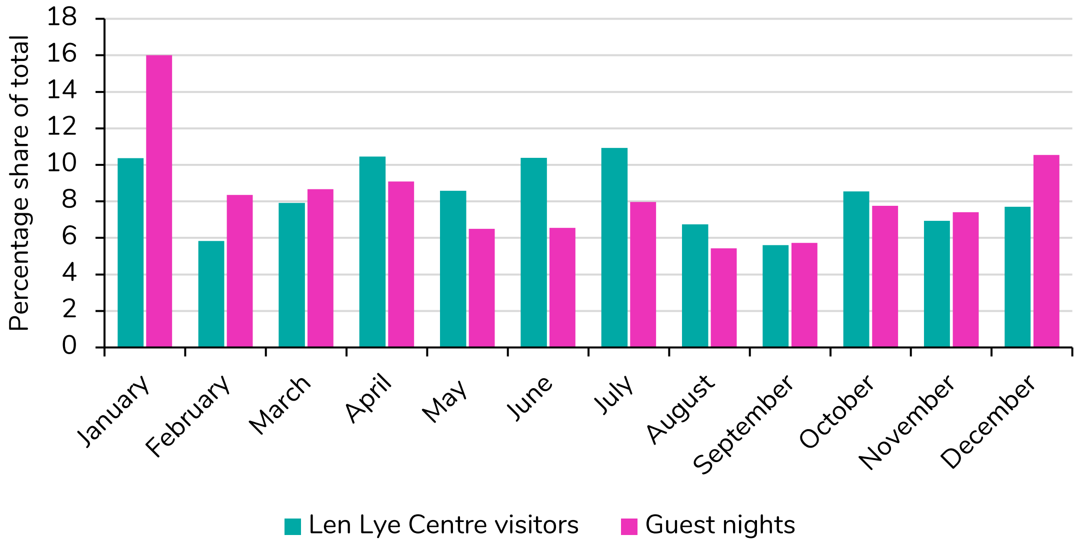
Figure 1 Annual visitor numbers and annual ticket numbers



Source: Len Lye Centre

Visitors to the Centre do follow an interesting seasonal pattern, as displayed in Figure 2, which shows the monthly average percentage share of total annual visitors and New Plymouth guest nights for the last five years.

Figure 2 Seasonal percentage share of Len Lye Centre visitors and New Plymouth guest nights, by month, average across last five years



Source: BERL analysis and Len Lye Centre

Figure 2 shows that four months of the year represent on average 10 percent of total visitors. These higher visitor months were January (10.4 percent), which is during the main summer holidays and international visitor period, followed by April (10.5 percent), June (10.4 percent), and July (10.9 percent).

Matching the monthly share of visitors to the monthly share of commercial guest nights in New Plymouth shows that between April and October the Centre had higher rates of visits compared to guest nights. It is likely that this was due to higher local visitor numbers exploring indoor activities available during the colder and wetter winter months, given that entry to the Centre is free for locals. The Len Lye Centre Cinema also screens a number of nationally-coordinated film festivals over these months, which attracts a dedicated audience.

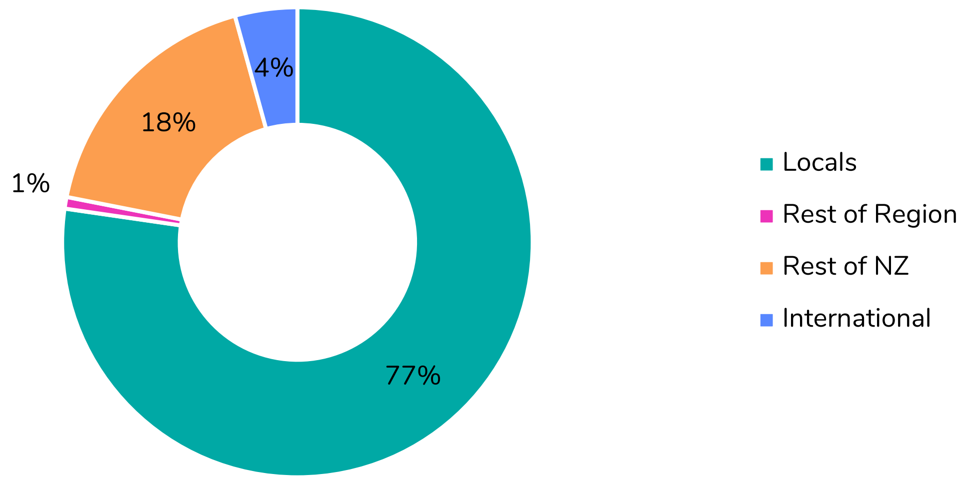
According to the figure, most visitors come between November and March, which are the warmer summer months, with guest nights peaking in January (16 percent of total guest nights), and December (10.5 percent) and February (8.4 percent) not far behind. Although these months account for 35 percent of total guest nights, they only bring in 24 percent of the Centre's total visitors.

The months with the lowest share of visitors to the Centre occur in February (5.8 percent), August (6.7 percent), and September (5.6 percent). Increasing visitor numbers through these months may be a good avenue for the Centre to increase both its visitors and its contribution to the local economy. While August and September are quieter months for both the Centre and New Plymouth, February sees a substantial number of visitors coming into the city.

Overall, visitors to the Centre do follow a slightly seasonal pattern, with around 40 percent of total visitors coming to the Gallery during the four months from April to July, although this does not match up to guest night arrivals, which show that most out-of-town visitors to the district arrive between December and March. The Centre could attract more visitors during the summer months by widening its appeal to tourists while still keeping its local visitors engaged throughout the colder off-season months.

The ticket information, along with the visitor survey data, allows us to estimate the likely share of visitors, by origin, for 2024-25.

Figure 3 Visitor source breakdown, 2024-25



Source: BERL analysis and Len Lye Centre

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of visitors to the Centre are New Plymouth District locals (77 percent); this lines up with the difference in total visitor numbers and the number of entry tickets purchased by those visiting from outside the district. While under-16s and Friends of the Gallery members are able to enter for free without a ticket, we estimate that these categories would amount to no more than 20 percent of the total tickets purchased.

Based on the visitor survey data, we can estimate that 18 percent of visitors (13,950 visitors) came from the rest of New Zealand, while four percent were international visitors (3,390 visitors), and just one percent were from the rest of the Taranaki region (630 visitors).

2.1.3 Visitor expenditure

While we have estimated the total number of visitors from outside the New Plymouth District who have visited the Centre in 2024-25, we now need to determine the likely expenditure of these visitors. To do this we need to estimate the daily spend of these visitors by their location. For international visitors we have used data from the international visitor survey, which details total expenditure on their trip to New Zealand and the number of nights spent in New Zealand, including the number of nights in Taranaki. Using microdata available from MBIE, we were able to estimate that international visitors who visited the Centre stayed in the Taranaki region for around 4.2 nights on average and spent around $350 per night.

For domestic visitors to the Taranaki region, we used data from MBIE on commercial accommodation providers and tourism expenditure estimates. Combining these two datasets allowed us to estimate that domestic visitors coming to the Centre from outside the Taranaki region would stay 2.2 nights and spend around $250 per night, while those domestic visitors from within the region would stay on average one day in the New Plymouth District and spend around $200.

In order to avoid double counting of any economic impact, we have assumed that the cost of tickets to enter the Centre and any retail or cinema purchases are excluded from the spending amounts of non-local visitors.

2.1.4 Overall economic impact

To determine the overall economic impact of the Centre in the 2024-25 year, we have combined tourism expenditure data for visitors from outside of New Plymouth District, along with the annual operating expenditure for the Centre. In the 2024-25 financial year, the Centre had direct operating expenditure of $5.6 million; visitors from the rest of the Taranaki region spent around $106,000 in New Plymouth; visitors from the rest of New Zealand spent $6.4 million in New Plymouth; and, lastly, international visitors spent $4.2 million in New Plymouth. Overall, $10.8 million of annual expenditure can be attributed to individuals visiting New Plymouth and the Centre.

Combining this visitor expenditure with the direct operating expenditure of the Centre provided a combined direct economic impact of $16.4 million for the district, which generated $9.2 million in GDP and employed 125 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs) directly in both the Centre and in tourism businesses in the district (Table 1).

Table 1 Economic impact of the Len Lye Centre, 2024-25

	Direct	Indirect and induced	Total
Expenditure ($m)	16.4	8.4	24.8
GDP ($m)	9.2	4.5	13.7
Employment (FTEs)	125	27	153

Source: BERL

This direct economic impact will lead to further indirect and induced economic impacts throughout the district. We estimate these indirect and induced economic impacts by using multiplier theory, which allows us to calculate the total overall economic impact for the 2024-25 year. In total, we have estimated that the Centre contributed a total economic impact of $24.8 million in expenditure and $13.7 million in GDP and supported 153 FTEs worth of employment.

This means that for every $1 the council provided in general rates funding ($5 million), the Centre generated $2.73 in total GDP for the district's economy. This ratio highlights the Centre's societal benefits by showing how the initial investment multiplied into a greater overall economic value for the community.

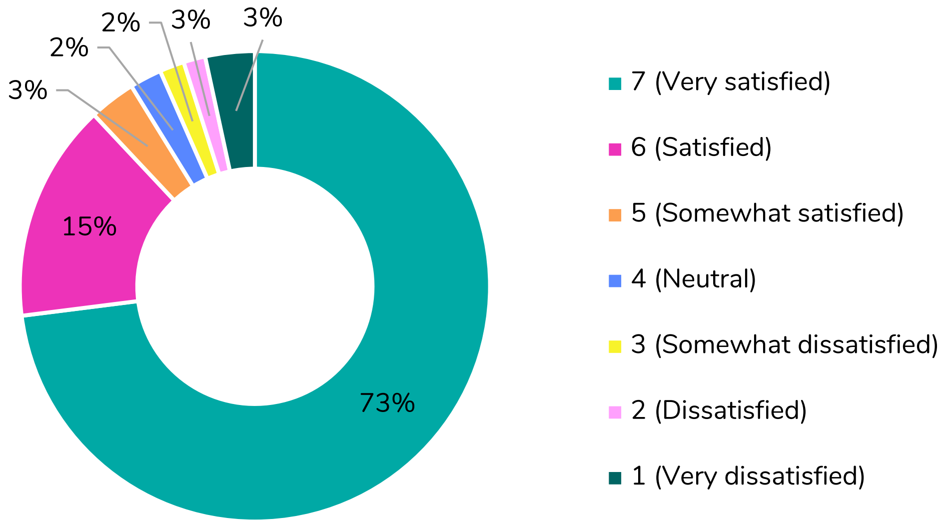
2.2 Cultural and social impact

Along with the economic impact that the Centre generates for the New Plymouth District, it also contributes substantially to the cultural and social development of the district. This cultural and social impact can be explored through understanding the interactions visitors have with the Centre, including their satisfaction levels during their visit, the number of times they visit, and the activities they undertake during their visit. In addition to these interactions with visitors, we can also explore the Centre's education programmes and community engagement via its Friends of the Gallery Society.

2.2.1 Visitor satisfaction

Respondents to the last 12 monthly surveys (August 2024 through July 2025) undertaken by the Centre were asked about their satisfaction with their visit to the Centre. The results are shown in Figure 4, which shows that almost three-quarters (73 percent) of respondents were very satisfied with their visit to the Centre. Overall, 91 percent of respondents were very satisfied, satisfied, or somewhat satisfied with their visit to the Centre, while eight percent of respondents were either very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or somewhat dissatisfied with their visit.

Figure 4 Visitor satisfaction with the Len Lye Centre, 2024-25[1]



Source: Len Lye Centre

Compared to the 12 months to August 2024, the percentage of respondents who were satisfied with their visit to the Centre has fallen from 97 percent. Due to the way in which the survey data was supplied, we were unable to split these results by origin of visitors or other details that could provide further context on who was dissatisfied with their visit. However, one of the businesses interviewed said that visitors can be disappointed when the amount of Len Lye's art on show at the Centre does not meet their expectations.

2.2.2 Number of visits in the last two years

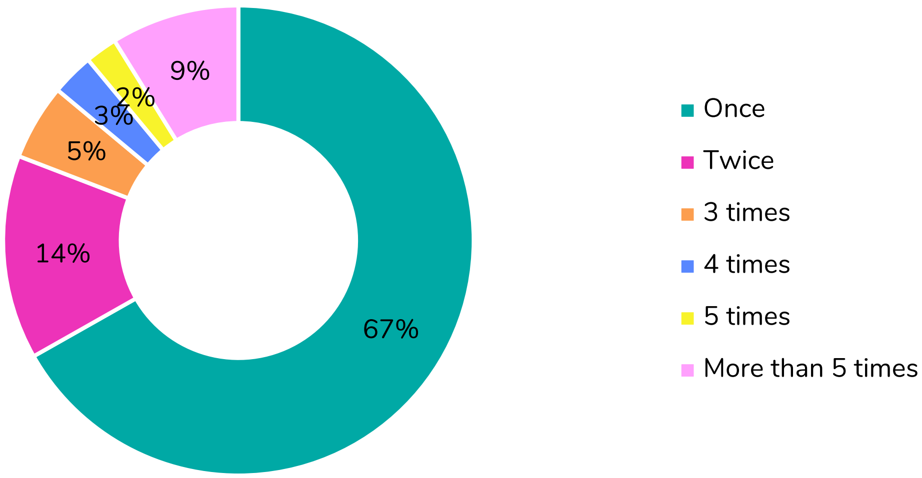
To further explore the cultural and social impact of the Centre, we investigated the number of times over the previous two years that visitors had come to the Centre. This data was sourced from the visitor survey undertaken by the Centre.

The number of times an individual visits the Centre can provide some indication of whether the annual visitor numbers comprise a small number of visitors visiting lots of times or whether it is reaching or appealing to a wider audience of visitors who visit the Centre once or twice. As shown in Figure 5, two-thirds of visitors (67 percent) visited the Centre once across the last two years, showing that for the majority of visitors, it is a singular experience.

[1] Due to rounding, percentages add up to 101 percent.

Interestingly, there is a small percentage of visitors (nine percent) who have visited the Centre more than five times over the last two years. It is likely that these dedicated individuals are members of the Friends of the Gallery or locals who enjoy the activities that the Centre provides. Overall, the average number of times an individual respondent to the visitor survey went to the Centre in the last two years was 1.9, which shows that the Centre is an attraction that can attract visitors to it for multiple visits.

Figure 5 Number of visits per visitor to the Len Lye Centre in the last two years, 2024-25



Source: Len Lye Centre

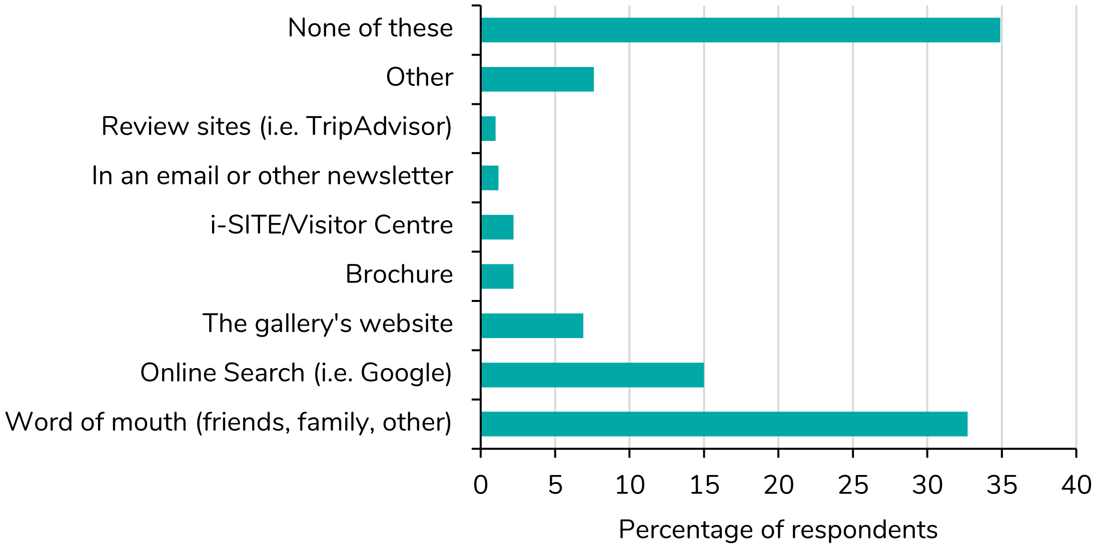
2.2.3 Sources of information about the Centre

One of the ways in which the Centre makes a social and cultural impact is in the methods used to distribute information about its activities and offerings. Ensuring that potential visitors are aware of the Centre and its attractions is an approach to possibly increase the number of people interested in visiting. In Figure 6, we can see the sources of information respondents to the visitor survey used to gather information about the Centre.

The most common source of information was word of mouth from family, friends, and others, with 33 percent of respondents noting this as a source of information. This indicates that the Gallery's best advertising is its own visitors who spread the word about the Centre to future visitors. This is backed by the visitor survey, which asked how likely it was that the respondent would promote the Gallery to others, with 75 percent very likely to promote it and 10 percent unlikely to promote it. This equates to a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 65 percent (an NPS above 50 is rated as excellent).

The next most common sources of information were online searches using Google and other search engines, used by 15 percent of respondents, and the Gallery's website, used by seven percent.

Figure 6 Sources of information used to gather information about the Len Lye Centre, 2024-25



Source: Len Lye Centre

Of particular interest for the Centre is that almost 35 percent of respondents to the visitor survey indicated that they did not search out any information on the Centre prior to visiting. This suggests that the Centre is so well known that visitors to the Gallery do not feel the need to look up information prior to visiting, or that its location in New Plymouth enables it to attract visitors into the Centre who have not pre-planned their visit.

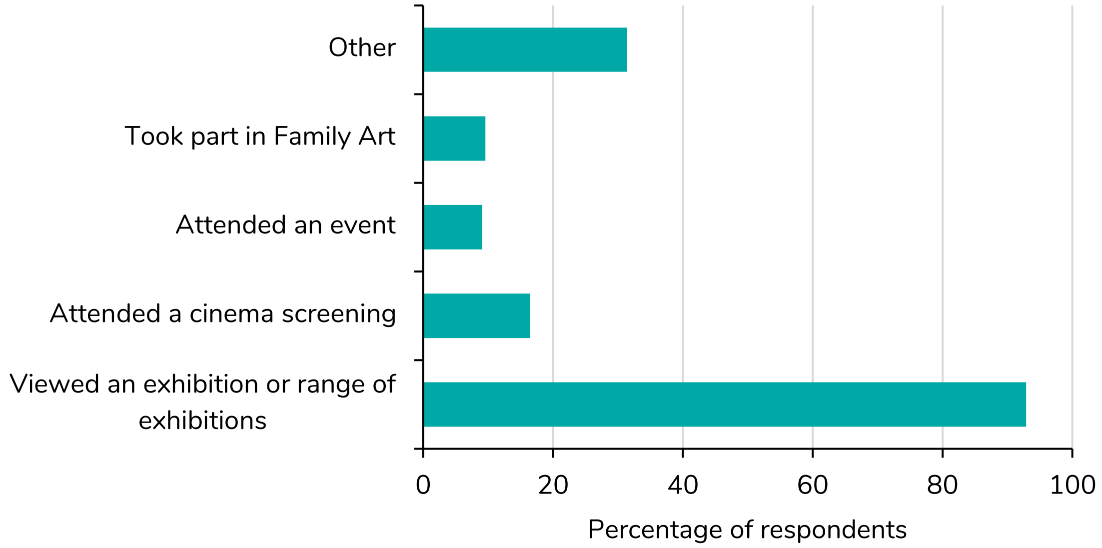
2.2.4 Activities undertaken at the Centre

Given the level of satisfaction being expressed by visitors to the Centre and the one-third of visitors who make multiple visits, what activities are drawing people to the Centre? Within the visitor survey, respondents were asked about which activities they undertook during their visit(s) to the Centre.

As shown in Figure 7, almost all visitors (93 percent) to the Centre viewed an exhibition, or a range of exhibitions, which is unsurprising given the nature of the Centre. What is more interesting is the level of attendance for other activities, with 17 percent of respondents attending a cinema screening, nine percent attending an event held at the Centre, and 10 percent taking part in Family Art. Family

Art is a free Sunday morning activity that involves participants having a hands-on, art-making session that is designed for the whole family.

Figure 7 Activities undertaken at the Len Lye Centre by visitors, 2024-25



Source: Len Lye Centre

Finally, 31 percent of visitors noted that they undertook another activity outside of the specified ones in the survey. Only a handful of respondents specified which other activity they undertook, which was visiting the Gallery shop.

Overall, we can see that the exhibitions held by the Centre are the main attraction for visiting, although it is beneficial to the Centre that they are able to provide other activities, which 10 to 20 percent of the respondents participated in during their visits.

2.2.5 Cinema programme

Outside of the exhibitions, the other main attraction of the Centre is its cinema screenings. As noted in Figure 7, around 17 percent of respondents to the visitor survey attended a cinema screening at the Centre. Data shared by the Centre for the 2024-25 year reveals that the Centre held 1,512 screenings in its cinema and admitted 28,376 people to its screenings, around 19 people per screening on average across the year.

All cinema attendees are counted in the total entry numbers for the 2024-25 year, which means approximately 36 percent of visitors attended a cinema screening during the year. It is likely that the difference between this percentage and the 17 percent reported by survey respondents is due to either a small number of visitors going to an extensive number of cinema screenings or people going to multiple screenings during one visit.

2.2.6 Education programmes and visits

The Centre offers a range of education programme options, based on its exhibitions and other art events. These programmes offer a mix of hands-on and Gallery-based learning and change each term or as the exhibitions change. All education programmes are led by Gallery educators and take place in the Gallery spaces, with hands-on activities in the Todd Energy Learning Centre when time allows.

Education programmes are designed mainly for primary, intermediate, and secondary school students. The Centre does also welcome early childhood students, although these sessions require more planning given the age of the children. Education programmes cover a range of topics, including sound and movement, kaupapa Māori, te reo Māori, marae-based learning, animation, history, and media studies.

In 2023-24, 3,391 students visited the Len Lye Centre, while in 2024-25, 3,889 students visited.

2.2.7 Friends of the Gallery

Established in 1971, the Friends of the Gallery (the Friends) is an independent incorporated society whose purpose is to 'support and promote the interests of the Gallery'. The Friends represent the community both locally and nationally, and their activities benefit the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre. Since it was set up, the Friends has helped organise exhibition openings, concerts and events, workshops and studio visits, and has funded events, programmes, and acquisitions to the Gallery's permanent collection.

As of June 2025, there were 226 memberships, of which around 45 percent were annual memberships and 55 percent were life memberships. This is a small increase in membership numbers since August 2022, when there were 210 memberships. Prior to 2022 membership records are inaccurate.

2.2.8 Govett-Brewster Foundation

Over the decade from 2015 to 2025, the Govett-Brewster Foundation has been a cornerstone in supporting the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery’s growth, primarily through sustained and strategic fundraising via partner and philanthropic relationships. Each year, the Foundation has channelled significant resources into the acquisition of artworks, the realisation of projects, and the support of programmes that sit beyond the Gallery's core funding. Annual contributions made by the Foundation to the Gallery have ranged from $10,925 in 2017 to a peak of $285,794 in 2024, with consistently strong support in recent years: $65,300 in 2023 and $85,316 in 2025.

The Foundation's fundraising approach has been multifaceted, combining private donations, membership fees, and sponsorships. In 2023 alone, it raised $228,198 in donations and $39,656 in sponsorship, followed by $244,199 in donations and $55,154 in sponsorship in 2024. In 2025, it continued to deliver with $136,020 in donations and $38,176 in sponsorship. It has advanced donor engagement and relationships through a vibrant calendar of events, including art tours, foundation dinners, an annual gala, and corporate entertaining. Notably, the Foundation has also leveraged major gifts and bequests to further support the Centre and strengthen the Gallery's national and international reputation.

Beyond direct financial contributions, the Foundation has played a vital advocacy and partnership role, promoting the Gallery's interests in the public sphere and enabling special projects such as the acquisition of major works, most notably Brett Graham's *Tai Moana Tai Tangata* in 2024, fully funded by donations.

Over this period, the Foundation's prudent financial management has ensured the sustainability of its mission, maintaining robust reserves and investment portfolios to buffer against economic fluctuations and ensure ongoing support for the Gallery's ambitions.

2.2.9 Overall cultural and social impact

Overall, the cultural and social impact of the Centre comes from three sources: visitors to the Len Lye Centre, the education programme, and its community engagement via the Friends of the Gallery society. The Centre leaves an overwhelming impact on visitors. They report high levels of satisfaction with their experiences at the Centre, are excellent promoters of the Centre (resulting in an NPS of 65), and are the main source of information for other visitors.

Increasing numbers of students visiting the Centre, along with the engagement of visitors with its programmes such as Family Art, showcase the Centre's role in promoting creativity and innovation in students and visitors to the Gallery.

3 Qualitative insights

While quantitative data provides essential metrics on visitor numbers, spending, and employment, it often cannot capture the full scope of an institution's influence. Qualitative insights add depth and context to these figures by revealing how the Len Lye Centre is perceived and experienced by local businesses. Through interviews we gain a richer understanding of the Centre's role as a cultural anchor, its contribution to New Plymouth's identity, and its influence on tourism flows and investment decisions. These perspectives help illuminate the broader social and economic value of the Centre, value that may not be fully reflected in numerical data alone.

This section presents qualitative insights gathered through interviews with businesses located near the Len Lye Centre (the Centre). The purpose of these conversations was to understand how the Centre influences local economic activity beyond direct visitor spending. Interviewees shared their perspectives on customer demographics and seasonal trends, as well as the Centre's role in shaping New Plymouth's identity as a cultural destination. These insights provide valuable context for interpreting the Centre's broader contribution to the regional tourism ecosystem.

The interviews confirm that the Centre functions as an anchor attraction within New Plymouth's tourism ecosystem. It is a major drawcard that enhances and bonds together the region's various tourism offerings. The Centre is frequently listed among the "top things to do" in New Plymouth/Taranaki, alongside the Coastal Walkway, Pukekura Park, Puke Ariki museum, and natural attractions. As one interviewee put it, today's visitor to New Plymouth can "climb the mountain and go to the beach…and also have a bit of art" in their itinerary, thanks to the presence of institutions like the Len Lye Centre.

Importantly, the Centre is unique to the region, giving New Plymouth a competitive edge. *"Everyone has arts festivals and walkways these days,"* a local hotelier remarked, highlighting how the Centre provides a distinctive reason to choose New Plymouth over other destinations. The combination of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's contemporary art and the Centre's kinetic sculptures and films is one-of-a-kind. This uniqueness attracts art enthusiasts from around New Zealand and abroad. Businesses observed that a subset of visitors travel primarily to experience the Centre, a testament to its pulling power as an anchor.

At the same time, the Centre does not operate in isolation; it is embedded in a network of attractions. The interviews highlighted how the Centre complements other activities, effectively anchoring a full "destination package". A rainy-day tourist can spend the morning at the Centre and the nearby Puke Ariki museum, then enjoy local cafes and restaurants, all within the walkable arts and cultural precinct. In the evening, they might attend a show at the TSB Showplace Theatre, which, together with the Gallery, forms the “play” component of the precinct’s stay–eat–play offering.

In this way, the Centre’s presence enriches the overall visitor experience, lengthening stays and increasing spend. Even visitors who are drawn primarily by nature (e.g., Taranaki‘s outdoor attractions) often end up visiting the Centre as an additional experience, especially if they have an interest in the arts or some time to fill.

Furthermore, being an anchor means that the Centre has influenced tourism flows and growth at a macro level. New Plymouth was traditionally not viewed as a major tourism hotspot, but over the last decade, roughly corresponding with the Centre’s opening in 2015, tourism to Taranaki has grown organically.

While multiple factors contributed to this rise (e.g., events like the WOMAD festival, improved air connections, and region-wide promotion), one clear sign of the Centre’s impact was Lonely Planet naming Taranaki the world’s second-best region to visit in 2017, specifically highlighting the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre and the Pouakai Crossing trek as unmissable experiences. It helped put New Plymouth on the cultural tourism map, attracting visitors who might not have come otherwise and encouraging longer visits. Media coverage and word-of-mouth from visitors have raised awareness of New Plymouth as a dynamic arts destination, thus feeding back into more tourism.

In sum, the Centre serves as an anchor by being a primary attraction that draws visitors and by linking with surrounding attractions to support a thriving tourism ecosystem. It increases the breadth and depth of things to do in New Plymouth, thereby supporting tourism growth and stability in the region.

3.1 Key themes from business interviews

From the interviews with nearby businesses, several clear themes emerged regarding the Centre’s role in the local economy and tourism ecosystem.

Unique anchor and icon

Local businesses see the Centre as an irreplaceable anchor attraction in New Plymouth’s tourism landscape. They say that “nowhere else has Len Lye”, underlining the Centre’s uniqueness. The building's iconic stainless-steel facade and contemporary design make it a landmark that visitors seek out and photograph, even if they don't venture inside. This distinctiveness draws visitors to New Plymouth and differentiates the region's offerings.

Positive impact on visitor traffic

Businesses described the Centre's presence as having a positive impact on their customer numbers. Visitors often include the Gallery in their itinerary, and for some tourists, the Centre is the primary reason for visiting New Plymouth. One tour operator described the Centre as adding significant value to the range of experiences on offer to their clients.

Integration into the tourism ecosystem

Businesses incorporate the Centre into the broader tourism ecosystem and their own services. The Centre works in tandem with other attractions (like the Coastal Walkway and Pukekura Park) to provide a holistic and complementary visitor experience, especially on rainy days or for culture-oriented tourists, appealing in particular to visitors who seek a mix of nature, art, food, and wine.

Shaping cultural identity

The Centre plays a key role in shaping New Plymouth's identity as a cultural and vibrant city. Business owners spoke to how the Centre has elevated the city's profile. Its reputation and media coverage have given the city a positive profile nationally and even internationally, associating the city with cutting-edge art and architecture. One interviewee called it "the jewel in the crown of New Plymouth", reflecting local pride in the institution. The presence of the Centre signals that New Plymouth is more than an oil, gas, and agriculture town – it's also a hub for arts and culture, which helps attract a different demographic of visitors.

Catalyst for investment and vibrancy

The success and draw of the Centre have instilled confidence for further private investment in the surrounding area. One developer credited the Centre with giving them confidence to expand offerings and invest in redeveloping the historic neighbourhood. Since the Centre opened, tens of millions of dollars have been invested in the adjacent West End precinct in new boutique hotels, restaurants, and shops, creating a lively district for visitors. This suggests a multiplier effect, with the Centre's presence contributing indirectly to economic growth by encouraging business development in the area.

Visitor demographics and trends

The Centre helps attract a demographic of visitors interested in art, culture, and high-quality experiences. According to the interviewees, these often include middle-aged to older couples and international tourists seeking cultural stops off the typical path. One business had observed a rise in American and European visitors who have "money to spend" and who appreciate arts and culture. All businesses noted seasonal patterns, with peak visitation in summer and during major events or festivals, with quieter periods in winter. They reported that big exhibitions or events, such as opening nights of exhibitions, spur noticeable upticks in visitor numbers and bookings as art aficionados travel in for those occasions.

Collaboration and community engagement

There is an existing collaborative relationship between the Centre and local businesses, although it has room to grow. Businesses mentioned partnering on events like pre-show dinners, guided tours, or providing guests with admission vouchers. Businesses frequently promote the Centre in their marketing. The Centre is also part of joint marketing under the "West End Precinct" brand, combining hospitality, accommodation, and art into one cohesive destination experience. This collective approach highlights the Centre's role as a hub in a network of local tourism services.

Economic benefits beyond direct spending

Beyond ticket sales or shop revenue, the Centre generates indirect economic benefits for the region. Businesses attest to the spillover effect, saying that visitors who come for the Centre inevitably spend money in the town on other services and attractions, amplifying the Centre's impact across the local economy.

3.2 Untapped opportunities

Despite the Centre's achievements, several interviewees highlighted key challenges that restrict its potential. The most common concern is that its stunning spaces, including the boutique cinema, are often underutilised for events. Local businesses pointed out that council bureaucracy and high venue hire fees are significant barriers, with one tour operator observing that "the bureaucracy of the Council limits access for private hire", and a hotelier adding that fees of $700–$1000 per day "deter regular use".

These challenges have prevented the Centre from realising its full potential as a vibrant, multi-use venue. Businesses recommend adopting a more flexible, commercially-minded approach to attract more community and corporate events, such as conferences, dinners, or weddings, describing the spaces as “incredible” settings. The boutique cinema, seen as a “real gem”, could also benefit from hosting more frequent film screenings to draw local and visitor audiences.

Finally, interviewees see value in building deeper partnerships, such as joint promotions with tour operators and hotels, and in easing hiring restrictions, for example, simplifying the catering rules. These changes, they suggest, would help the Centre make the most of its facilities and better serve the wider community.

4 Conclusion

The Len Lye Centre (the Centre) plays a pivotal role in New Plymouth's tourism ecosystem, contributing significantly to the region's economic, social, and cultural vitality. This assessment, based on a mixed-methods approach, reveals a multifaceted impact that extends well beyond direct visitor spending.

Quantitative findings show that in the 2024–25 year, the Centre generated a total economic impact of $24.8 million in expenditure and $13.7 million in GDP and also supported 153 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs. These figures include both direct impacts, such as operating expenditure and visitor spending, and indirect and induced effects across the local economy. The Centre attracted nearly 80,000 visitors, with a substantial proportion coming from outside the New Plymouth District, reinforcing its role as a drawcard for regional and international tourism.

Qualitative insights gathered from interviews with surrounding businesses highlighted the Centre's status as a unique anchor attraction. Local stakeholders described the Centre as a cultural icon that differentiates New Plymouth from other destinations, enhances the visitor experience, and stimulates investment in the surrounding precinct. Businesses reported increased customer traffic, a stronger brand identity for the city, and a multiplier effect on tourism-related services. The Centre's integration into the broader tourism offering, alongside natural attractions and hospitality, was seen as essential to New Plymouth's appeal.

Beyond economics, the Centre delivers substantial social and cultural value. Visitor surveys indicate high satisfaction levels and strong word-of-mouth promotion, with a Net Promoter Score of 65. The Centre's education programmes and community engagement, through the Friends of the Gallery Society, further demonstrate its role in fostering creativity, learning, and civic pride. Activities such as Family Art and cinema screenings diversify the visitor experience and encourage repeat engagement.

In sum, the Len Lye Centre is not only a cultural institution but also a catalyst for regional development. Its economic contributions, cultural distinctiveness, and community engagement collectively position it as a cornerstone of New Plymouth's identity and growth. Strategic opportunities exist to further enhance its impact, particularly by increasing its attraction for summer visitors, expanding event utilisation, and deepening partnerships with local businesses

Appendix A Methodology and definitions

In this report, we analyse the impact created by the Len Lye Centre's activities in Taranaki in 2024-25. The analysis uses multipliers derived from inter-industry input-output tables for New Zealand and for the four regions. Input-output tables have been derived and updated from the national input-output tables produced by Statistics New Zealand. Input-output tables are a powerful analytical tool for describing the structure of New Zealand's economy. They show the relationships between industries, the goods and services they produce, and who uses them. Multipliers allow us to identify direct, indirect, and induced effects in terms of expenditure, gross domestic product (GDP), and full-time equivalent (FTE) employment.

Multiplier analysis

Multiplier analysis is a robust and well-understood method for quantifying the economic impact of a programme, investment, or event. Multiplier analysis is a "partial equilibrium" method that tracks how money ripples through a regional economy. It is a "partial equilibrium" model because it assumes that prices of goods and services will not change due to the new expenditure and that other demand for the same goods and services will not be affected by the new demand being modelled. For instance, money spent on constructing a factory in a region is used to purchase materials from inside that region. Purchases that are local to that region (such as local construction companies and manufacturers) also lead to further re-spending in the community. Local spending is calculated in rounds, where a proportion of spending is assumed to circulate in the local economy and another proportion is assumed to be spent outside the region (a "leakage"). For each round of spending, the amount spent in the region becomes smaller and smaller due to leakages until the amount approaches zero. Adding all the rounds together creates the multiplier.

At a high level, multiplier analysis involves categorising the spending created by the investment in question (including both the capital and operating expenditure) according to which industry it has been sourced from. Then, an assumption is made for each line of spending as to what proportion has been imported and what proportion is domestic. Finally, the data is passed into an implementation that combines this data with multipliers to produce the required estimates. The multipliers are derived from input-output tables. These tables are an accounting model of the inter-industry flows in the economy. Multipliers allow us to identify direct, indirect, and induced effects in terms of expenditure, gross domestic product (GDP), and full-time equivalent (FTE) employment.

Measures of economic impact

The four measures used to describe economic impact are:

1. Expenditure: The value of production, which is built up through the national accounts as a measure of gross sales or turnover. This is expressed in $million at constant prices (i.e., removing the effects of inflation) and includes GST.
2. GDP: The increase in output generated along the production chain, which, when aggregated, totals gross domestic product, or GDP. This is the sum of:
    a. Compensation of employees (e.g., salaries and wages)
    b. Income from self-employment
    c. Depreciation
    d. Profits
    e. Indirect taxes, fewer subsidies.

   Note that expenditure is made up of the above (value add) plus:
    a. Intermediate purchases of goods (other than stock in trade)
    b. Intermediate purchases of services.
3. Employment: The volume of employment is usually expressed as full-time equivalents (FTEs). These are estimated as the number of full-time employees and working proprietors and one-third of the number of part-time employees, converted to an annual basis. FTEs provide a measure of total labour demand associated with expenditure, e.g., four full-time jobs running for three months or three part-time jobs running for a year would be shown as a single FTE.
4. Household income: This measure follows from the measure of extra employment created. Each new FTE represents a household that will enjoy an increase in income from supplying labour to the economy because of direct investment.

Direct, indirect, and induced effects

The underlying logic of multiplier analysis is relatively straightforward. An initial expenditure (direct effect) in an industry or an enterprise creates flows of expenditures that are magnified, or “multiplied”, as they flow on to the wider economy. This flow occurs in two ways:

1. The industry purchases materials and services from supplier firms, which in turn make further purchases from their suppliers. This generates an indirect (upstream) effect.
2. People employed in direct development and in firms supplying services earn income (mostly from wages and salaries, but also from profits), which, after tax is deducted, is then spent on consumption. There is also an allowance for some savings. These are the induced (downstream) effects.

Hence, for any amount spent in an area (direct effect), the actual output generated from that expenditure is greater once the flow-on activity generated (indirect and induced effects) is considered.

Leakages

Generally, the more developed or self-sufficient an industry in a region is, the higher the multiplier effects. Conversely, the more reliant an industry is on supply inputs from outside the region, the lower the multipliers. These outside factors can be referred to as “leakages”.

To put this another way, if you purchase a meal at a restaurant in Taranaki, and all the meal ingredients and labour were sourced in Taranaki, and all the materials and labour that went into making the meal materials were also sourced in Taranaki, and then that labour spent their wages or salaries in Taranaki, again on goods or services produced solely in Taranaki, then all the multiplier effects would be captured by Taranaki. Where inputs or outputs come from outside the region, leakages are said to exist, and the multiplier effect is reduced.

Limitations of multiplier analysis

Impact

Multiplier analysis assumes that an event or series of events will not have an impact on relative prices. In a dynamic environment, however, it can be assumed that a large event would have an impact on demand and supply, and therefore on prices. Hence, the larger the event and the more concentrated it is in a single industry or region, the more likely it is that the multipliers will give an inaccurate analysis of impacts. For example, multiplier analysis cannot be used to determine the effect of the entire performance events industry nationally.

Aggregation

Industries outlined in input-output tables are aggregates of smaller sub-industries. Each sub-industry has unique inputs and outputs. The higher the level of aggregation, the less accurate these inputs and outputs become. Thus, if determining the multiplier effect of a very specific event or activity using highly aggregated data, there will be a lower level of accuracy. Similarly, if an event or activity encompasses a range of industries and multipliers from a single industry are applied, the accuracy levels will diminish.

Regions and boundaries

The smaller or less defined a region and its boundaries are, the less accurate the multiplier analysis will be. Similarly, the easier it is to move across boundaries, the less accurate the analysis will be. For example, at the national level, the multipliers will be accurate, as it is easy to determine the inputs and outputs crossing through the New Zealand borders. Similarly, it would also be relatively accurate to determine a North Island/South Island split. As smaller regions without obvious geographic boundaries are selected, a higher level of assumptions needs to be made, and the multipliers become less accurate. For example, an individual could work in the Auckland region but live in the Waikato region and spend a large proportion of their recreation money in the Bay of Plenty region. For any regional analysis, the level of accuracy will have to be accepted. As a rule of thumb, the larger and more defined the region, the more accurate the analysis will be.