

Downtown Incubator Technical Committee

Whitepaper | November 20, 2018

Chair | Chuck Barney, Severson Entrepreneurship Academy

Introduction

In the spring of 2018, the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) travelled to our community to provide insight and advice as to how to grow the economy of our region. An area of opportunity noted to support increased access to tools to grow entrepreneurship was the creation of an incubator space and associated programming located in the heart of our community - Minot's Downtown. In order to capitalize on this opportunity, Chuck Barney (Director of the Severson Entrepreneurship Academy at Minot State University) convened a gathering of stakeholders to begin putting together a roadmap to plan for and establish an incubator to meet the needs of budding entrepreneurs in the region. The following pages of narrative describe, at a high-level, the proposed incubator space, process to develop it, and practices for sustainability.

Downtown Incubator Technical Committee Members:

1. Chuck Barney - Minot State University - Severson Entrepreneurship Academy
2. Jessica Ackerman - Aksal Development Group
3. Mary Beth Votava - Small Business Development Center
4. Emily Schroeder - Dakota Business Lending
5. Lorena Starkey - Hyatt House/Connect Minot
6. Lyndsay Ulrickson - Souris Basin Planning Council
7. Briselda Hernandez - Souris Basin Planning Council
8. Shannon Straight - City of Minot
9. Tim Mihalick - IEDC Implementation Project Manager/First Western Bank & Trust
10. Megan Laudenschlager - Strengthen ND

Desired Incubator Space

With the insight and feedback from several committee members over a multi-meeting span, several desirable amenities and features were discussed:

- **Downtown Location:** To support the vitality of Minot's epicenter, the desire of the committee is to find a location near Minot's proposed downtown gathering place to support foot traffic to and visibility of the incubator.
- **Server Space:** Technology is an ever-growing asset to entrepreneurship and an overall diverse economy; therefore, the committee is proposing adequate server space be allocated within the incubator to allow for data storage, growth, and other technological advancements.
- **Food Innovation Incubator:** The Minot community is surrounded by agriculture. With the increasing demand to add value to this economic staple, a community kitchen incubator space would be a desired component to allow for the commercialization of agricultural products through value-added ag manufacturing, pop-up restaurant or food truck preparatory space, and culinary education.

- **Small Business Incubator:** To support budding entrepreneurs, a well-equipped small business incubator space must be developed. This will include adequate meeting space, office equipment, access to phones, and individual (affordable) office spaces.
- **Access to Service Providers:** To support the ecosystem of entrepreneurs in Minot, it is necessary and appropriate to create a “one-stop-shop” accessibility point to allow for maximum utilization of the area’s resources. Through targeted programming created by economic development and small business partners, availability of tangible tools and resources, and proximity of established resources within the space, entrepreneurs will find the incubator a desirable place to meet as many of their needs possible when developing their business models and concepts. Some cooperative-space service providers proposed include:
 - Small Business Development Center
 - SCORE
 - Severson Entrepreneurship Academy
 - Souris Basin Planning Council
- **Library of Experienced Professionals:** To support peer-to-peer learning, mentoring, and networking, it is important that a feature of the incubator be a Library of Experienced Professionals that can be accessed, within reason, by individuals creating and developing business ideas.

Process to Develop Incubator

Through the work of the Downtown Incubator Technical Committee, it is proposed that the process behind developing the incubator space be undertaken in four phases proposed below. *Additionally, it is worth noting that the process undertaken will be done so through a lens of developing **complimentary** programs, services, and amenities that build on the strengths of our community, rather than developing a **competitive** asset.*

Phase 1: Organize

A vital step to ensure that the planning process is thoughtful and inclusive will be allowing enough time for organization. In addition to the current members of the technical committee that have been meeting regularly, representatives from the City of Minot and Minot Area Development Corporation will be sought for participation. As the planning process moves forward, additional committee members will be added as appropriate and as time allows.

Phase 2: Assess

During the assessment process, the technical committee will work to develop and execute community input mechanisms, like an online entrepreneur survey and/or small group entrepreneur meetings. This phase will be focused on identifying available or well-accessed programs and services, gaps or obstacles to accessing services, and mapping potential service coordination or implementation that could support the growth of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the community.

Phase 3: Strategize

Utilizing the information gathered during the assessment process, the technical committee will work to create practical strategies to support the development of the incubator space. This will include:

- Developing the needed corporate structure of the entity (board governance model),
- Developing integral community partnerships,
- Identifying programming and amenities needed,
- Identifying capital and operational fundraising plan, and
- Creating a viable sustainability and growth plan.

Phase 4: Reflect & Implement

After the strategy phase is complete and a draft plan is developed by the technical committee, the draft plan will be disseminated to members of the IEDC Stakeholder Committee, entrepreneurship community, and City of Minot for buy-in, comments, revision, acceptance, and overall implementation.

Partners

To date, the following partners have been included in the work of the technical committee: Small Business Development Center, Souris Basin Planning Council, Minot State University - Severson Entrepreneurship Academy, Strengthen ND, Connect Minot, Aksal Development Group, Dakota Business Lending, and City of Minot. It is anticipated that this partnership group will be expanded upon greatly in the coming months.

Sustainability

Much thought has been put into the feasibility and financial picture of the proposed Downtown Incubator. It is anticipated that in order to support a flexible, responsive, and fiscally viable incubator space that an independent nonprofit model will need to be created - insulated from the influence of partner missions and/or partner funding. In order to support a fiscally viable operating structure and the capital requirements for a project of this scope, multiple layers of funding will be braided. This funding mechanism may include grants from private and community foundations, investments from economic development programs, private fundraising and contributions, potential contract opportunities, eventual programming and rental revenues, and MAGIC Fund resources.

Next Steps

Once this aforementioned process is reviewed and discussed by Minot's City Council, the technical committee will begin embarking on Phase 1: Organize to move this effort forward.