Feasibility Report: Entrepreneurship Hub

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Executive Summary

The Entrepreneurship Hub (eHub) is a student-led service dedicated to providing its members with access to entrepreneurial services through consults, seminars, and community collaboration. The eHub hopes to become the first point of contact for students who are interested in discovering more about entrepreneurship. The program's mission is to provide education, support, and mentorship to UBC students in an effort to promote a greater entrepreneurial mindset on campus. We empower our students to seek solutions to problems and become agents of change in their communities, workspaces, and their organizations, while preparing them to continue on to the next stage of their entrepreneurial journey. The focus here is on providing a low barrier service that supports students in the initial stages, or "the first 15%", of their entrepreneurial journey.

The eHub will fulfill its mission by expanding the local entrepreneurial ecosystem through peer consults, creation of a cohort curriculum, and collaborating with existing entrepreneurship bodies in the community. This service aims to bring students from diverse backgrounds together to spur growth in UBC's entrepreneurship scene.

Background Information

Business incubation carries the potential to positively impact both campuses and their overlying metropolitan areas. The success of this service will rely not only on the diligence of the project's involved parties, but also on any external parties and industry partners that stand to contribute additional value and support. Evaluation of this project's feasibility hinges on a holistic assessment of the problem the program is addressing, as well as the program's goals, scope, and future potential with regard to the UBC community. The AMS eHub is designed to have tangible services accessible to students within the upcoming academic year. Some preliminary programs and initiatives include:

- **Consultation** process for aspiring entrepreneurs.
- Creation of a **cohort curriculum** that amalgamates potential ventures for fund-seeking and mentorship purposes. Provision of curriculum on entrepreneurship topics.
- Campus-wide **events** to encourage student collaboration.

The AMS eHub will be offered as a service of the AMS Student Society to the students of the UBC Vancouver Campus. The eHub is funded by the AMS but will also be seeking funding and sponsorship from e@UBC and other external partners.

Consultation Process & Findings

Prior to implementation of the service, three months of feasibility research was conducted in order to determine if this service would provide significant value to UBC students, in an effort to ensure that it fills a substantial service gap on campus. We approached this process attempting to speak with campus leadership, current internal and external organizations associated with entrepreneurship, thought leaders in spurring entrepreneurship on campuses, and students from many faculties.

Carleton's Hatch

Our first conversation began with Carleton University's Hatch Program, whose goal is to act as a low barrier hub of entrepreneurship on the Carleton campus in Ottawa. We learned that their goal is to help grow entrepreneurship on campus, host workshops to educate students in the space, and act as a feeder system to their university incubator. They have identified the inherent value of having the service governed by the Student Society, an important factor that allows for a unique peer connection with the students of Carleton (an aspect that university incubators often struggle with). The model in which the eHub program will function was heavily influenced by that of Carleton's Hatch.

E@UBC

After multiple conversations with e@UBC, an important gap in low barrier support for early stage entrepreneurship was identified. As was identified at Carleton, the presence of a professional incubator on campus did not provide support for *all* students hoping to enter this space. Students looking for early stage assessment, entrepreneurial career exploration, and those that had socially-oriented ventures in mind are not currently served. Furthermore, the AMS' unique positioning to students allows for highly accessible early stage support to more students than that of the current incubator on campus. The value of entrepreneurship is not limited to those who want to create a company - the value lies in nearly every student advancing both their creative and problem-solving skills, applicable to any career and faculty.

Centre for Students Involvement & Careers (CSI&C)

The CSI&C aims to support undergraduate and graduate students on UBC's Vancouver Campus to meet, connect, network, and build relationships, in addition to providing career support services. Our conversation with Carol Naylor focused on two main questions: Is there significant value in providing entrepreneurial support to students? If so, is this being met by the center or anyone else on campus? The answer to the first question was yes - a tremendous amount of value exists in providing students access to this type information (especially given that their career

counselors often struggle with this nature of support when students inquire about entering the field). They currently do not facilitate any support with regards to entrepreneurship, identified support for entry-level entrepreneurship as a major gap, and were excited to have further conversations on how they can help eHub in supporting more students.

Thought leaders

Extensive research and conversations were had with numerous professionals who have worked in or have a deep passion for entrepreneurship, specifically with its application in universities. The most insightful conversations were with Paul Cubbon (Head of Entrepreneurship and the Sauder School of Business), Blair Simonite (Program Director at e@UBC), Tony Briggs (president and Founder of eHub Alberta), Trina Wang (BC Tech Association), Mark Proudfoot (Creative Destruction Lab), and Thenuka Karunarante (UBC student Entrepreneur).

Paul and Blair recommended that we seek to not simply become another group on campus competing with one another for more students, but to be a hub and facilitator for students and clubs on campus. This recommendation has guided our approach for the community portion of the eHub. Tony, who has created a similar service at the University of Alberta, helped make clear the distinction between an accelerator and an incubator; the first being a place to scale ventures while the latter simply being a place where students can find out information, attend workshops, and work with like-minded students. We approached Trina in order to understand the bigger picture potential of a service such as this with respect to growing technology and innovation in British Columbia and Vancouver.

"The value of educating students on entrepreneurship is one of the most important aspects moving forward in the next 10-15 years. The best way to prepare for this future is to have students empower other students to start thinking about entrepreneurship" –Trina Wang, BCTIA

This sentiment was brought up numerous other times, including conversations from Thenuka and Mark, both have attended UBC, and both have experience with their own successful startups. The message with these two was that there should be a simply one hub where students can meet other like-minded students, whether that is for mentorship or partnership in their ventures.

Problem Identification

After conducting discussions and consultations with professionals, advisors, and students, it was revealed that a low barrier hub to encourage students to start entrepreneurial projects or to start thinking like entrepreneurs is entirely absent. Furthermore, a gap exists in providing tangible support

to the initial stages, or "the first 15%", of a student's journey. This is important in supporting students in further developing their thinking strategies, something that is lacking at such a large university. By establishing programs and collaborating with organizations such e@UBC and others, the core goal of the eHub program is to address the lack of highly accessible idea-phase to early-stage entrepreneurship support on campus.

Differentiation between eHub and e@UBC

When speaking to the program director of e@UBC and other leaders in the entrepreneurship space on campus, the following gaps were identified:

1. **Career exploration** – e@UBC is not designed to support student wanting to explore entrepreneurship in the first place. Their focus is on supporting students who have ideas and potential ventures established.
2. **Early stage assessment** – e@UBC has indicated that the design of their program requires that students enter the incubator with their ideas assessed, hypotheses tested, and have figured out their problem before coming to e@UBC.
3. **Socially-focused enterprises** – With e@UBC falling under the portfolio of the VP Research & International, the projects currently supported are heavily research-focused and provide limited support for more socially-inclined enterprises.

Why the AMS?

   The AMS prides itself on supporting students and being the voice for support services they need and desire. Current organizations focused on entrepreneurship generally struggle with supporting students, given that most of the staff are adults and do not have the time or energy to link to students in a grassroots type of way. Once again, these groups have made clear that true value exists in having peers support other peers when it comes to the early stages of entrepreneurship development. e@UBC, through efforts like the Student Network, has not been entirely successful in reaching students in a highly accessible manner.

Project Goals

The introduction of this project will aim to address the following goals:

- Work with e@UBC to create an entrepreneurship curriculum for students
- Build a campus focused on innovation and collaboration
- Facilitating workshops and events catered to venture building and professional development
- Establish partnerships with campus business clubs under the eHub, including but not limited to the CSI&C, e@UBC, AMS, and others.

- Create and distribute marketing materials for the eHub service

Project Scope

The three prongs that the service will focus on are as follows: consults, a cohort curriculum, and community engagement.

Open Consults:

It is critical to implement a consistent engagement philosophy in order to effectively serve the campus community's needs, as determined through the aforementioned consultations. Consults will be the first point of contact for students beginning their entrepreneurial journey, whether they are uncertain if entrepreneurship is for them to having a developed plan but wanting support in one specific area. We will support students by training volunteers to provide peer supported guidance on entering the entrepreneurship field, as well as referring them to any resources on campus if they are further along the entrepreneurial journey. The eHub service will aim to leverage the overarching UBC and Vancouver entrepreneurship network to accomplish this.

For example, a student coming in for a consult will be asked a number of preliminary questions through a questionnaire, including experience/understanding with entrepreneurship, what their motivation is, and what goals they have in mind. With this knowledge of what a student is interested in, we will have established structures to support students in discovering what the appropriate next steps are. Following that, they will be introduced to one of our student volunteers who will support them in either business or personal development, design, and programming. Each of these three sections will hold at least three volunteers, and will be able to provide primary guidance for students entering the consultation. We will also ensure that we make any connections they may require to mentors through e@UBC, guide them to any online resources we will have pre-populated, or anything else they may require.

Cohort System:

The second area focuses on the creation of a cohort system for students. The curriculum will focus on early stage development and assessment regarding entrepreneurial ventures. **Specifics areas of support that the curriculum will provide include: competitive landscape assessment, developing hypotheses, prototyping, determining viable ideas, and building a team of cofounders**. By establishing a common curriculum that a group of students can collectively participate in, best practices can be shared and a common methodology standard can be established. The main standard that this program will aim to implement is a common methodology for developing entrepreneurial ventures. These ventures will then either be funneled into the Launchpad program at e@UBC or other incubators in Vancouver. If these ventures do not succeed through the cohort system, eHub will work to prepare them to work within start-ups in Vancouver. This will be

done by connecting to organizations that recruit for startups or the startups themselves, understanding what they truly want from their new recruits, and providing students access to that information through their experiences with eHub. eHub will also play a role in funneling successful students into e@UBC, who will be then able to provide support for the next stages of the development of those ventures.

Community Engagement:

The third area, community engagement, involves creating a hub for all of campus' entrepreneurship organizations to come together. By creating such a space, the service will be able to generate synergies not accessible with each group currently working independently (and often times competing). This will also work to eliminate existing service redundancies as existing organizations may have overlap in their services offered to students. An example of a community engagement piece includes consolidating annual hackathons that currently take place with similar or identical missions.

A part of creating a network of students includes the newly established Inter Collegiate Entrepreneurial (ICE) Network which was started by a Princeton undergraduate student, with the aim of connecting university entrepreneurial associations in order to share talent and resources to spur collective growth across different cities. MIT, Brown, Columbia, UNC, USC, and Stanford have agreed to join this network, with the addition of AMS' eHub contributing to UBC being known as an entrepreneurial hub of innovation globally.

These three operating principles will help students to build ventures using a tangible toolkit. Its intention is to provide a way to solve real-world problems and limit exposure to risk in a short amount of time. The introduction of these principles will also prepare participating students if they ever decide to involve themselves in other incubators or accelerators, and will shift their thinking towards an entrepreneurial mindset.

Performance Measures

Performance measurement for the eHub lies in the awareness generation of the service's outreach efforts and the number of students that decide to make use of the consults, partake in the curriculum, and attend related events. Specific metrics that should be considered to determine overall service effectiveness are the following:

- $\frac{Total\ Curriculum\ Graduates}{Total\ Program\ Costs} = Cost\ per\ program\ participant$

Tracking the cost per program participant illustrates how efficient the incubator program will be in generating students with enhanced entrepreneurial knowledge. It also serves as an indirect measure of overall program cost management.

- $\frac{Total\ Event\ Attendees}{Total\ Marketing\ Costs} = Marketing\ cost\ per\ event\ attendee$

A significant portion of the service's success relies on effectively marketing the service's benefits to the campus student population. Therefore, it would be prudent to track the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. This would allow service organizers to use alternative marketing methods if current methods are shown to be ineffective.

- $\frac{Current\ Year\ Participants\ -\ Previous\ Year\ Participants}{Previous\ Year\ Participants} = Community\ engagement\ growth$

Like any program or service, overall growth is important when considering expansion decisions. Knowing the overall growth trend of the service can help organizers strategically plan future program initiatives. It also implicitly signals the overall efficacy of the service's efforts.

The aforementioned metrics are intended to act as service-health indicators over time. In addition to soliciting participant feedback through surveys, performance metrics provide a relatively un-biased community feedback medium that can signal the community's receptiveness and awareness to the eHub's services and efforts.

Project Assumptions & Constraints

The service's financial structure would initially comprise AMS funding, with external sponsorship inflows possible in later stages of the program. With the proposed service adopting an administrative structure of volunteer members and one paid coordinator, most of the funds used will be directed to providing services and events after one-time start-up costs are paid. With this operating structure, two important constraints to consider are the service's budget and its volunteer involvement.

Budget

As funding for this project will be solely from the AMS, creative measures must be considered when it comes to ensuring the most responsible spending of student fees. One way to reduce spending includes hosting joint events and programs with other entrepreneurial organizations, resulting in increased campus outreach and cost reduction. The current annual proposed budget is as follows:

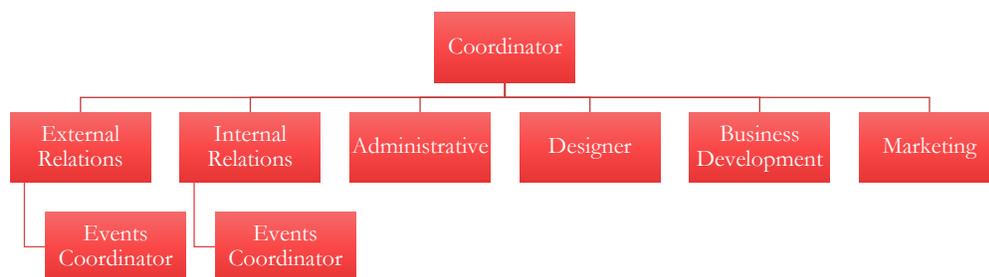|	
Coordinator Salary	$12,238.95
Benefits	$571.14
Miscellaneous Expenses	$100
Office Supplies & Postage	$50
Photocopying & Administration	$50
Furniture & Equipment	$150
Events	$2,000
Volunteer Training	$500
Volunteer Appreciation	$250
Special Projects	$500
	Total: **$16,410**

Other funding options

Throughout the research and feasibility stages, other sources of funding to run this service have been explored. These include government grants, funding from the university, grants from banks and credit unions, sponsorship opportunities, and financial support from e@UBC and the CSI&C. Government grants are offered to other organizations similar to ours at different universities and a list of them have been identified. Banks and credit unions also provide financial support for services such as this one, and as a non-profit, we are applicable for more support from these institutions.

The most promising avenue of financial support has been from e@UBC and the CSI&C, who have agreed to provide money for events, workshops, conferences, and building out our current service offerings. The success of this will be determined in the next month, as discussions have paused with anticipation of approval of the service.

Volunteer Constraints

As the proposed structure only includes one paid coordinator and a service staff of volunteers, the time commitment of the latter is a foreseeable challenge. Volunteers will have multiple commitments with regard to academics and other extracurricular involvements. Therefore, it is important that the service's reporting structure be designed in a way that allows limited involvement from volunteers without diluting the impact and value-added by the eHub service. That being said, to help solve this we will provide specialized training and potential accreditation to them through our channel partners. There they will be able to develop personally, while at the same time capable to provide advice and support to curious students.

Coordinator

External Relations | Internal Relations | Administrative | Designer | Business Development | Marketing

Events Coordinator | Events Coordinator

Methodology

The philosophy of many incubators around North America is that of ensuring that those ventures that go through their process do so with limited risk and exceedingly increasing upside. This methodology is not simply about learning how to be a successful entrepreneur and run a business, but rather recognizing what students can learn from those businesses to improve virtually everything that is done. One can imagine Lean Startup principles applied to government programs, to healthcare, and to solving the world's greatest problems.

Three principles outline what it means to be lean, and the importance of doing so in an ever changing environment:

First, rather than engaging in months of planning and research, entrepreneurs accept that all they have on day one is a series of untested hypotheses—basically, good guesses. So instead of writing an intricate business plan, founders summarize their hypotheses in a framework called a *business model canvas*. This will be one of the primary models given to students who enter the service for consultation.

Second, lean start-ups use a "get out of the building" approach called *customer development t*o test their hypotheses. They go out and ask potential users, purchasers, and partners for feedback on all elements of the business model, including product features, pricing, distribution channels, and affordable customer acquisition strategies. The emphasis is on nimbleness and speed: New ventures rapidly assemble minimum viable products and immediately elicit customer feedback. Then, using customers' input to revise their assumptions, they start the cycle over again, testing redesigned offerings and making further small adjustments (iterations) or more substantive ones (pivots) to

ideas that aren't working. This second step will vital following the initial models to truly test the ideas the potential entrepreneurs believe to be true.[1]

Third, lean start-ups practice something called *agile development,* which originated in the software industry. Agile development works hand-in-hand with customer development. Unlike typical yearlong product development cycles that presuppose knowledge of customers' problems and product needs, agile development eliminates wasted time and resources by developing the product iteratively and incrementally. This is how we will assist people to create a "minimum viable product" which is the simplest prototype to test with your customers.[2]

Risk Analysis

With the intention of the eHub acting as a complimentary service to existing entrepreneurship programs on campus, the risks inherent to this service will be different from that of a traditional competitive organization.

eHub Entrepreneurship Incubator Table of Risk				
	Risk	**Probability Scale**	**Impact Scale**	**Mitigation Strategies**
Internal Risks				
Financial	Program expenses significantly exceed the amounts budgeted by the program coordinator.	Low	3-5	Track program spending over time. Establish a mandate to keep a specified amount of cash on hand at all times. Arrange for external partnerships to supplement the AMS budget.
	The cost per program participant is deemed prohibitively high, and the AMS decides that its funds could be best directed elsewhere.	Low	5	Ensure that each expenditure can be linked to some added benefit of the program. Conduct quarterly reviews of expenses to eliminate redundant or non-value added items.
Operational	Volunteers are unable to commit significant amounts of time with regards to involvement with eHub.	Medium	3	Design a program reporting structure that allows for limited involvement without lost value. Place core activities in the hands of the most involved members.
External Risks				

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[1] https://hbr.org/2013/05/why-the-lean-start-up-changes-everything
[2] http://scalemybusiness.com/the-ultimate-guide-to-minimum-viable-products/

Reputational	Other campus bodies may perceive eHub as a competitive threat rather than a collaborative partner, resulting in refusals to cooperate.	Low	4	Establish a dialogue with campus bodies to communicate eHub's intentions and direction. Consult with their members to see how eHub can add value without overlapping with others' existing efforts. These conversations have been extremely supportive and collaborative in nature.

Options and Alternatives Analysis

To ensure that the eHub is operating optimally, evaluation of alternative approaches must be considered. After consultation with community members, it was suggested that the following three options also be kept in consideration:

Lobbying

Members of the AMS have succeeded numerous times in lobbying efforts on behalf of students. An alternative option for the creation of the service that was explored included lobbying the university for the expansion of current entrepreneurial services to fill this gap. The problem with lobbying lies in the fact that even following a successful effort, the gap on campus would still not be filled. The issues are two-fold – firstly, the current problem is on providing accessible, low-barrier support to students in this space. The current organizations have not been able to succeed in this area despite previous efforts, with putting more money into this space being an unfeasible solution. Secondly, the mandate of e@UBC (as well as other existing entrepreneurship support services) are very distinct – e@UBC is an incubator, indicating that the stages of support that the entire service is designed to provide is markedly different. Once again, the design of e@UBC requires that people enter with developed business ideas. A representative from the VP Research & International office has also made it clear that provincial funding, which currently funds e@UBC, would unlikely increase further in supporting entrepreneurship on campus.

Entrepreneurship Support Vehicle

One option to consider is a stripped-down version of the eHub where no curriculum is provided. Rather, the service would include support for other entrepreneurship campus bodies through provision of volunteer personnel and funding. The aim of this would be to enhance the outreach and impact of existing bodies. This route would not include an actual service provision component and would fail to meet the expectation of being an AMS Service.

Entrepreneurship Conference

Another option is to retain the existing services of the program, but to condense its operating cycle into a weekend-long conference. There, the same cohort curriculum would be introduced, and campus bodies and community partners would still be presented under the eHub umbrella. This option would be significantly costlier than other alternatives and would serve for fewer students.

Status Quo

An option that should always be considered is inaction. By not creating the eHub, campus organizations would continue to run as is, without the realized benefit of additional support from an AMS body.

Recommendation

While other alternatives have their merits for providing accessible, low-barrier support for aspiring entrepreneurs, none provide the centralized environment for students quite like the proposed eHub structure. The provision of a standardized curriculum, partnerships with campus bodies and external companies, and the establishment of an entrepreneurship network on campus addresses the needs of the student body in ways other alternatives fall short. By creating a space that students can rely on for support and idea generation, the eHub in its proposed form aims to cultivate a culture and ecosystem for existing and aspiring entrepreneurs alike.

Implementation Plan & Timeline

December	• Send out recruitment information for hiring volunteer team • Continue conducting research with community partners
January	• Host first networking event • Complete feasibility report
February	• Begin creating content for marketing service • Attend conferences and other places to promote the Incubator to potential stakeholders
March	• Work to have financing possibilties secured • Complete creation of consult prong • Consolidate business clubs under one umbrella
April	•Hire new staff for upcoming year •Reach out to off campus incubators/accelerators for partnerships •Develop curriculum portion
May	• Look into further funding for program • Start marketing service at UBC and around Vancouver • Work to have service up and running for students

Conclusion

The eHub project aims to address UBC's lack of low-barrier access to entrepreneurship support by creating a service intended to spur entrepreneurial activity on campus. This service will act as an arm of the AMS and work to bring other entrepreneurship campus bodies together through joint initiatives and events.

The effectiveness of its marketing efforts and program participation rates will likely determine the service's perceived performance, but evaluation of performance should include consideration for the service's inherent limitations with regards to its budget and volunteer base. After identifying inherent risks of the program and other possible alternatives, it is recommended that the eHub project be pursued due to its provision of multiple services and benefits that other options fail to achieve.

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