

Our MVP: State Library of Queensland's Business Studio

ABSTRACT

In 2014 research for SLQ 2020 identified strong interest within the Queensland community for State Library of Queensland (SLQ) to make available a centre of excellence for new entrepreneurs and innovators. The research outcome aligned strongly with the State government Advance Queensland initiative. Queensland is boosting our entrepreneurial culture by improving access to finance, new business opportunities, and management support for startups and small to medium enterprises. Brisbane City Council also declared a strategic intent of developing Brisbane as the Start-Up capital of the world.

From this background emerged SLQ's transformational innovation - our very own Minimum Viable Product - SLQ Business Studio.

The 12 month pilot was based on design thinking principles, meaning the prototyping of the service occurred in real time with real clients and followed the Lean Start-up methodology, a core component of which is the "build-measure-learn" feedback loop. The pilot focus was on establishing the key partnerships and designing the model for a successful Business Studio at SLQ that can be adapted to use within Queensland Public Libraries or as a service to them.

The core elements facilitating the sustainability of the Business Studio are:

Membership – Membership is free and SLQ members are upgraded to Business Studio members to use the Studio space and receive information. The membership of the Business Studio was over 200 within its first 6 months

Service Delivery & Collections – This element was designed along the Government Research and Information Library (GRAIL) service model providing information navigation services to a community of interest, packaging the information and making it more widely available. Along with the information services the SLQ Business Collections were made more easily available to members.

Programs – The core of this element is to ensure that the programs designed are developed ‘for’, ‘with’ and ‘by’ the emerging business community. See Figure 1. Ideally programs will be accessible at SLQ South Bank as well as online and regionally. Fortnightly lunchbox forums in the Business Studio are delivered by the entrepreneurship community and local startups. These extremely successful sessions draw a slightly different audience to each event and introduce the Business Studio to a new cohort of interested users. Topics have included social media strategy, starting a food based business and the mistakes made by a 1st year start up.

Partners – The purpose of this element is to increase discovery and attraction of partners for the Business Studio that are willing to partner financially, by providing learning services/programs, and governance/guidance to the overall Business Studio concept. In the first 6 months of the start-up a partnership with Little Tokyo Two (L2T), a collaborative co-working community was established. L2T provide entrepreneurs from within their community to offer a no charge Entrepreneur in Residence (EIR) service onsite at the SLQ Business Studio 3 days a week. SLQ have also entered into a training partnership with Business Models Inc, an international strategy & design company that helps entrepreneurs and startups innovate their business model and design a future strategy.

You may think of Queensland as the sunshine state but the Palaszczuk government's Advance Queensland innovation initiative is all about positioning Queensland as the startup state. Advance Queensland is a suite of programs which include funding for startup events, business innovation research and partnerships and HotDesQ. This aspect of the Advance Queensland program is designed to attract entrepreneurial talent and to provide funding for global startups to relocate their ventures to one of 13 innovation hubs throughout the state for at least six months. The first 26 HotDesQ startups moving to the Startup state were announced in October 2016. Brisbane City Council have delivered a CBD innovation co-working space, The Capital which opened on the Queen St Mall at the end of 2016. Advance Queensland is designed to help create the knowledge-based jobs that are increasingly needed now and in the future, and to develop a strong innovation and entrepreneurial culture in Queensland.

SLQ's Business Studio developed within this entrepreneurial ecosystem. In September 2014 the research for SLQ 2020, a five year plan outlining the strategic direction of the library, identified strong interest within the Queensland community for SLQ to make available a centre of excellence for new enterprise, new entrepreneurs and innovators. Comments elaborating on this identified the need for support for micro and small to medium businesses accessing digital literacy and business skills development, workshops and meeting spaces, along with research services for those interested in getting started in a business. SLQ 2020 outlines that one of SLQ's key strategies is to enable new enterprise. Operating under the Engagement and Partnerships framework, SLQ engages with communities of interest through dedicated centres of engagement.

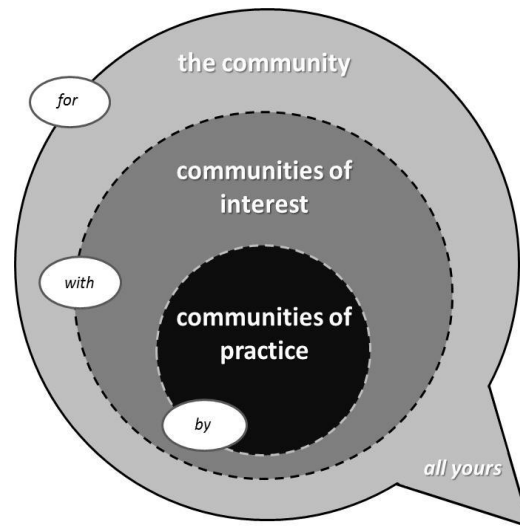


Figure 1. For, With and By the emerging business community. State Library of Queensland. 2015 p. 5.

The Business Studio was envisaged as a new dedicated centre of engagement that built on many disaggregated services SLQ already provided such as the Game Changers series through Asia Pacific Design Library, Enterprise programs at The Edge and Business Leaders Hall of Fame Awards.

A decision to establish a 12 month pilot Business Enterprise Centre within SLQ using the successful Government Research and Information Library (GRAIL) Services model was made by SLQ's Executive Team in early 2015. GRAIL operate within SLQ for a distinct set of users or members.

The pilot was based on design thinking principles and was SLQ's very own MVP. An MVP in this context is a Minimum Viable Product. When Eric Ries, the Silicon Valley entrepreneur and author of *The Lean Startup*, used the term for the first time he described it as:

“that version of a new product which allows a team to collect the maximum amount of validated learning about customers with the least effort.”

Over time it got simplified to: “the smallest thing you can build that lets you quickly make it around the build/measure/learn loop”. (Leanstack, c2016) An MVP is your

“first stab at releasing product that creates value for a specified customer segment”
(Vlaskovits, Cooper and Reis, 2013, p.132).

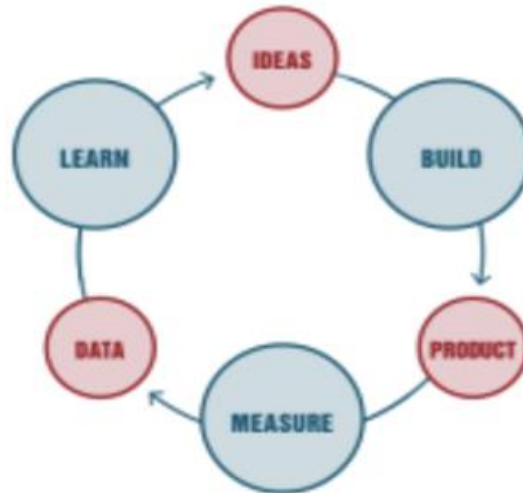


Figure 2. Build Measure Learn Loop Leanstack (c2016)

The pilot focus was on establishing the key partnerships and designing the model for a successful Business Studio at SLQ that could then be adapted to use within Queensland Public Libraries or as a service to them.

The pilot would test and evaluate a prototype which would inform the development of a service model to be delivered to startup and emerging businesses.

The pilot objectives were to

- Establish a pop up facility within SLQ’s Southbank footprint that could be used as a business facility and meet-up area for emerging business owners. This became the Business Studio as an SLQ exhibition space called The Studio was refurbished. The word Studio remained as part of the name as it kept some of the history of the space and saved on changes to signage which was in keeping with the lean startup MVP model.

- Co-locate the business collections from the SLQ Information collection which could be loaned directly to members of the Business Studio
- Provide research and information services to emerging and established businesses and business people of Queensland
- Create a membership model for the Business Studio that spanned the free to fee continuum.
- Evaluate the Business Studio services to inform the potential integration of such services into SLQ Business As Usual.
- Recommend outcomes from the evaluation that would inform the ongoing provision of services, model for service delivery and funding/resourcing required for support.

The following assumptions were identified for the project:

- SLQ services the Queensland community through the Community Engagement branch, the Business Studio will provide specialised services to a particular community of interest
- All areas of SLQ may be required to provide in-kind support through staff time and or operational seed funds to get the pilot operational by September 2015.
- The prototyping of the services is based on the GRAIL model and will need to be tailored to the needs of a different community of interest (emerging and small business) rather than government agencies.

This project focused on the new and emerging business owners and developers that need support to navigate the plethora of information and assistance already available to them, especially during the pre-learning and start-up phases of their

businesses. The Business Studio was to help businesses stand up before they start up, to essentially act as a start up incubator.

The project was approached in four stages:

1. Define and set up

This stage involved meeting, connecting and gathering feedback from community and stakeholder groups, and creating a design concept of the Business Studio model based on community feedback and refurbishing SLQ Studio to accommodate Stage 2 of the project. The Director, Engagement and Partnerships and Executive Manager, GRAIL attended startup meet ups, co-working conferences, business, government and social enterprise events meeting and mixing with the local entrepreneurial community. Feedback was strongly in favour of an enterprise as envisaged by SLQ and of the need for support and learning assistance at the very early stages of business development. Three startup/design companies were asked to submit concept plans to refurbish The Studio to become the Business Studio. Stage one concluded early August 2015.

2. Prototype and establishment of the Business studio

Defining workflows, relocating GRAIL and a business collection, a soft launch and marketing of the Business Studio along with a fully identified costing of the pilot stage comprised stage 2. This stage of our MVP involved many work units across the organisation, Project Management, Content development, Description Services, Finance, Facilities, Communications and Marketing, GRAIL, Web Services, ICT, Collection Access, Service Delivery, Community Engagement, Visitor Services, Partnerships and the list could go on. The assumption that all areas across SLQ would be required to provide in-kind support to enable our startup pilot project to be

up and running in a very very short space of time proved correct. Relocation of the 6.5 FTE (9 person) GRAIL team to the Studio space occurred in the last week of August and the SLQ Business Studio was launched, softly, a week later. The official launch by the Minister for Science, Information Technology and Innovation took place at the end of November.



Figure 3. Business Studio SLQ, Concept Image. Stephen Cameron Architecture 2015

3. Test operations

This was the most exacting stage as we followed the MVP model of build, measure, learn. Libraries are not always the most agile of places capable of quick changes in response to noted behaviour and feedback. This stage was the testing ground for the core elements that would determine the sustainability of the Business Studio.

The Service Delivery & Collections element was designed to test the GRAIL service model with the new and emerging business community of interest. Could the GRAIL model of providing information navigation services to a single community of interest, packaging the information and making it more widely available be translated to this audience? Along with the information resources and services the SLQ Business Collection was to be made easily available to Business Studio members. Description Services and Collection Access staff arranged for information collection items to be transferred to a new location of business studio. New books were also purchased from the existing information collection budget. There is no security or order in the arrangement of books in the Studio. This is a very active collection and to date no items have gone missing. It is also interesting to note that the recommended readings in the entrepreneurial space are not all recent books and Napoleon Hill's classic *Think and Grow Rich* and Dale Carnegie's *How to win friends and influence people* are on an entrepreneur's recommended reading list alongside more recent entrepreneurial guides. SLQ asked the entrepreneur's for their reading lists and is continuing to crowdsource content.

GRAIL staff created an MVP version of an online hub¹ for the Business Studio. It is centred around the areas of Start a Business, Research an idea, Learn More and

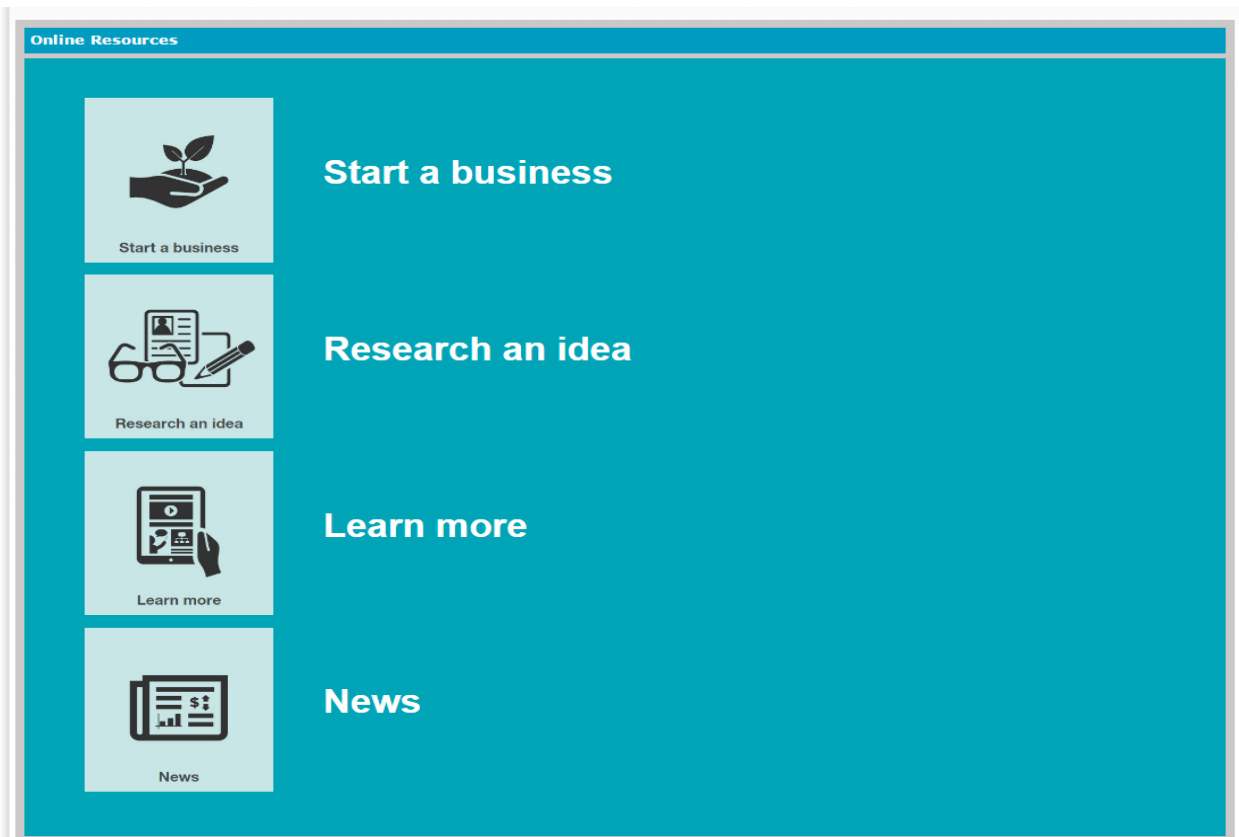


Figure 4. SLQ Business Studio Online Hub. State Library of Queensland 2015

News. It was developed using LibGuides so it could be created and be operational quickly and also easy to alter and add new content as required and in response to member feedback. It is envisaged that the hub will be translated to the SLQ website. What we learnt early from the startup community is they prefer more pictures, fewer words and the hub was too “governmenty” that is too wordy. We added more non-verbal content and links to videos and training from Lynda.com. Up to date community of interest content is refreshed through a Business Intelligence blog. (SL Blogs Members can browse or subscribe and receive articles, links to books and news once a month. The online hub links to all levels of government business information for getting started and running a business including resources on funding and grants and where and how to sell your product. Resources for research include

SLQ funded resources which require an SLQ membership to access as well as free resources like IP Australia.

Growing the membership was of course fundamental to the Business Studio's sustainability. Membership to both SLQ and the Business Studio is free of charge. Interested members first join SLQ and then the membership is upgraded to Business Studio. Many Business Studio members were new to SLQ membership. All Business Studio members need to bring their own devices. Easy access to power, dedicated Wi-Fi, Thinking Walls (easily maneuverable magnetic whiteboards) workstations, small group tables, lounge area, ceiling mounted projector, large screen television, copier/scanner, books and magazines are provided. The Business Studio has twenty seven bookable workstations and further seating on lounges or a couple of bean bags. A target of reaching 100 members by the end of the pilot period was set. This target was met within the first three months. By the end of October 2016 there were over 400 members of the Business Studio, a quadrupling of the success indicator. A fee based or platinum membership was proposed as a way of generating revenue to fund the ongoing Business Studio activities. The Business Studio is open 9am -5pm Monday to Friday. These hours are not necessarily ideal for the startup community particularly if you have a day job while working on your business idea. Platinum membership would offer sole use of the Business Studio one night or weekend for any event, reserved tickets to SLQ events such as Game Changers and up to six hours of premium research for your business. This form of membership was not generally marketed during the pilot and there are currently no platinum members.

The membership is predominantly male but this is beginning to even out. There are days when there are equal numbers of women and men making use of the Business

Studio. There have been some days when women have outnumbered the men. The age range is diverse, from late teens through to people in their sixties. The more mature Business Studio members may be looking to start a business following retirement or redundancy or operating a very small professional business.

The entrepreneurial community wants a community area not a library space to work in. It needs to be clean but not necessarily neat and ordered. They prefer to be able to put their own creative stamp on it. One member likes to come to the studio because it is cleaner than his house. The books that line the walls don't need to be returned in any order. While they are selected for their relevance to the community they also serve to add colour to the space and to help absorb sound and keep noise levels down. Members want to develop working relationships and are extraordinarily willing to share and to swap skills.

Programs have been a very successful element of the pilot. The methodology was to ensure that the programs designed are developed 'for', 'with' and 'by' the emerging business community. (State Library of Queensland. 2015. PID) The Studio began organising fortnightly learning and sharing sessions. These became lunchbox forums held every second Wednesday from 12:30. An inspiring entrepreneur, local startup, business leader or government representative presents a session in the Business Studio. As noted this community is very generous and many of the presentations have been delivered by members. Topics have included How to launch an idea with social media, how to create a startup by a team that personally incubated a startup a month in 2015, a young entrepreneur with a platform now valued at four million for capital raising talking about every mistake he made in the first twelve months and one of our research librarians on how to research your

Lunchbox Forums

Every fortnight we have a lunchtime learning event. Wednesday's from 12:30-1:15pm in the Business Studio. Don't forget to bring your lunch! Check out the upcoming forums.

Business Studio blogs

Read and subscribe

BI **Business Intelligence:** Entrepreneur, startup and business news

BU **Business Studio:** What's happening at the Studio and guest blogs

Business Studio

FREE MEMBERSHIP | Open Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm | Business Studio, level 1, SLQ

State Library of Queensland's Business Studio supports entrepreneurs and start-ups to make their innovative business ideas a reality. We provide free workspaces and a range of business resources to assist in your business planning and research. Use the space as your office away from home and network with likeminded people.

To access the Business Studio and its resources become a State Library member by visiting the studio or [register online](#)

BOOK A WORKSPACE

Individual and group workspaces can be booked by Business Studio members.

Reserve a space now, [book a workstation or group space.](#)

If you are not already a member, please [register online.](#)

For more info, please contact BusinessStudio@slq.qld.gov.au or call 3842 9929.

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Figure 5. Business Studio Online Hub. State Library of Queensland. (2015).

business idea using SLQ resources. You can follow the lunchbox forums on twitter with #slqbusiness. For Storify versions of each of the forums visit the Business Studio blog (State Library of Queensland. 2016 SL Blogs Business Studio) Book titles mentioned during the lunchbox forums are purchased for the Studio if not already held. Forums are generally interactive with great audience participation. Attendee numbers range from 15 to 50 people. Higher numbers attend when the speaker has promoted their presentation across their own networks. A byproduct of this is each lunchbox forum results in more business studio members as niche members of the startup community find out about the SLQ Business Studio. E.g. A session on starting a food business brought prospective food startups to the Studio for the first time. Partnerships team co-ordinate and follow up leads and offers to speak for the forums.

Partners form a crucial element of the success of the Business Studio. Part of the MVP model was that we could not do this alone. SLQ would need to partner with others to provide appropriate learning services and guidance to the overall Business Studio concept. Just after the soft opening, at one of the startup community events we attended we met Jock Fairweather, a young entrepreneur. He was enthusiastic and all in as he would say. He believed it was a great concept and arrived the next day to have a look and invited us to 'his place' to see a co-working community in action, learn and work on a business model plan together. Things were moving fast but we soon realised this was Jock's normal speed. He did tell us the Business Studio needed more colour, we should get flowers, have a community manager in the space and no uniforms. Jock is "Captain" and "Creator" of Little Tokyo Two (LT2). It was a fortuitous meeting for SLQ. Jock studied design at London College of Fashion and established a luxury shoe label. He sold his label to a Swiss Equity Conglomerate at 21 before returning to Brisbane in mid-2014. His friends at home were working on developing businesses but had nowhere to work. Jock decided to buy a house so they could all work there. There were soon more than 10 friends so instead of a house he bought an iconic former restaurant in Spring Hill, Brisbane called Little Tokyo Two and established his first co-working community there in 2015. There are now 4 LT2 co-working communities in Brisbane and they partner with SLQ Business Studio. LT2 is Australia's fastest growing community of innovators, creators and entrepreneurs. In the 2016 Lord Mayor's awards Jock Fairweather won Singapore Airlines Young Business Person of the Year award. He's 26.

Jock's values align well with those of the SLQ Business Studio. He believes in the concept and believes in the need for education, free resources and space to learn. SLQ Partnerships team worked with LT2 to create a formal partnership agreement.

One of the cornerstones of the agreement is the Entrepreneur in Residence (EIR) program. EIR's give their time and are rostered to be in the Business Studio three days a week. SLQ provides a free car park (which is hard to come by in South Bank) and a lunch voucher. These entrepreneurs are members of LT2 and work in the Business Studio on their nominated day and assist members as required. They have become regular Business Studio members and have mentored and collaborated with other Business Studio members trying to get ideas off the ground or establish their fledgling business. When a business idea has enough traction or the entrepreneur is making an income they can move on to a fee based co-working community.

If you are an entrepreneur your first or second or third business may not be "the one". We have learnt many things from the entrepreneurs sharing their insights in the lunchbox forums. How many times do you let a baby learning to walk fail? Do you stop them the first time they fall down? Of course not, in fact you never tell them to stop. Why tell yourself to stop your business idea? Your first development almost certainly will not be your last. During the course of the year a number of the members developed, delivered and promoted business including a number of apps. They also let go, sold or grew out of these businesses and moved on to new ideas.

The SLQ Business Studio transitioned from pilot project to business as usual in September 2016. The Executive Manager GRAIL and the GRAIL team have established a strong working relationship with the Entrepreneurs in Residence and the regular Business Studio attendees. The Executive Manager GRAIL is the Partnership owner of the agreement with LittleTokyoTwo and sits on the Advisory Committee for this agreement.

The natural business focus fit of the GRAIL team is to have operational responsibility for the Business Studio and to continue to work with Visitor Services to deliver the client service in the Business studio. GRAIL team will continue to deliver the Business Studio service to the clients of SLQ and work with the Information Services team with the provision of research and with the Partnership team for the coordination and provision of the Lunchbox forums.

Our next stage is adapting the model for use throughout the State, sharing and promoting the benefits of having “Business Studio” in your community. A Regional and Public Libraries forum will be held at SLQ in 2017 will look at what a model that will help libraries to support developing businesses in their Queensland communities would look like. The SLQ online hub and resources are available via public libraries throughout the State. Streaming lunchbox forums via SLQ facebook would provide a simple way of sharing expertise and broadening the community. This would make programs available online and regionally. Our partners LT2 are aiming to continue building communities in Brisbane and extend to regional Queensland. SLQ are in discussion about international library partnerships which foster business and entrepreneurialism which would share international expertise.

SLQ did build, measure and we certainly did learn. We can recommend the MVP model as a way of engaging closely with a community of interest. Be prepared to move quickly, receive honest feedback, and to extend yourself and your library well beyond your comfort zone.

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