Incubator Certification Program Overview

Business incubators nurture the development of entrepreneurial companies, helping them survive and grow during the start-up period, when they are most vulnerable. These programs provide their client companies with business support services and resources tailored to young firms. The most common goals of incubation programs are creating jobs in a community, enhancing a community's entrepreneurial climate, retaining businesses in a community, building or accelerating growth in a local industry, and diversifying local economies.

Incubators vary in the way they deliver their services, in their organizational structure and in the types of clients they serve. As they are highly adaptable, incubators have differing goals, including diversifying rural economies, providing employment for and increasing wealth of depressed inner cities, and transferring technology from universities and major corporations. Incubator clients are often at the forefront of developing new and innovative technologies – creating products and services that improve the quality of our lives in communities around the world.

The earliest incubation programs focused on a variety of technology companies or on a combination of light industrial, technology and service firms – today referred to as mixed-use incubators. However, in more recent years, new incubators have emerged targeting industries such as food processing, medical technologies, space and ceramics technologies, arts and crafts, and software development. Incubator sponsors have also targeted programs to support microenterprise creation, the needs of women and minorities, environmental endeavors and telecommunications.

A business incubator's main goal is to produce successful firms that will leave the program financially viable and freestanding, usually in two to three years. These incubator graduates have the potential to create jobs, revitalize neighborhoods, commercialize new technologies, and strengthen local and national economies. Typically, 30 percent of incubator clients graduate each year.

Oklahoma Business Incubators

In 1988, the Oklahoma Legislature passed the Oklahoma Small Business Incubators Incentives Act. The Act enables the tenants of a certified incubator facility to be exempt from state tax liability on income earned as a result of occupancy for up to five years. In 2001, the Legislature amended “the Act” to extend the tenant’s tax exemption from five to 10 years. The exemption remains in effect after the tenant is no longer an occupant in an incubator. In order to qualify for the tax exemption from the sixth through the 10th year, the tenant must make at least 75 percent of its gross sales to out-of-state buyers, to buyers located within the state if the product or service is resold to an out-of-state customer, or to the federal government. In addition, the Act enables the sponsor of a certified incubator facility to be exempt from Oklahoma income taxes for a period of 10 years.

Since the inception of the Act, the State of Oklahoma has benefited from increased revenues and increases in the number of start-up and expanding small businesses. These businesses have created jobs and enhanced economic activity in the Oklahoma communities in which they are located.

Oklahoma Department of Commerce and Incubators

The role of the Department of Commerce in the incubator process is to certify the incubators pursuant to O.S. Title 74 Section 5071-79 and convene critical partners to assure standards of excellence. It is the responsibility of the incubator owner to hire managers to manage and market their incubators and provide business services to their tenants.

As 2017 began, Oklahoma had 36 certified incubators. Hemphill Create, located in Tulsa, was the only new incubator to be certified this year. Six incubators closed in 2017 for various reasons. As 2017 comes to a close, 31 certified small business incubators are operating in Oklahoma (see Appendix), with tenants ranging from small service companies to high-tech research and development operations and manufacturing entities.
During 2017, Oklahoma incubator managers were asked to complete a questionnaire to document their activities for the current reporting period. Based on the information received from the responding incubator managers, 163 small businesses are currently leasing space in Oklahoma’s small business incubators. These incubator tenants provide 862 full-time jobs. The charts show the growth and changes in the incubator program throughout the last 9 years.

**Oklahoma Business Incubator Association**

The Oklahoma Business Incubator Association (OkBIA) was formed more than 20 years ago. The purpose of the OkBIA is to provide information, networking, guidance and assistance to incubator operators, as well as to work with the Legislature to promote and benefit business incubators and tenants.

**Standards for Success**

The International Business Innovation Association's (INBIA) developed a set of industry guidelines to help incubator managers better serve their clients. INBIA research has consistently shown that incubation programs that adhere to the principles and best practices of successful business incubation generally outperform those that do not. The following industry guidelines are replicable and broadly applicable to incubation programs around the world, regardless of their focus or mission.

**The Best Incubators Provide Services Such As:**

- Flexible space and leases
- Office services and equipment
- An on-site incubator manager as a resource for business advice
- Exposure to a network of outside business and technical consultants, often providing accounting, marketing, engineering and legal advice
- Assistance with financing
- Assistance with marketing

**Characteristics of Model Business Incubation Programs:**

**Commit** to the two core principles of business incubation

**Obtain** consensus on a mission that defines the incubator’s role in the community and develop a strategic plan containing quantifiable objectives to achieve the program mission

**Structure** for financial sustainability by developing and implementing a realistic business plan

**Recruit** and appropriately compensate management capable of achieving the mission of the incubator and having the ability to help companies grow

**Build** an effective board of directors committed to the incubator’s mission and to maximizing management’s role in developing successful companies

Prioritize management time to place the greatest emphasis on client assistance, including proactive advising and guidance that results in company success and wealth creation

**Develop** an incubator facility, resources, methods and tools that contribute to the effective delivery of business assistance to client firms and that address the developmental needs of each company

**Develop** stakeholder support, including a resource network, that helps the incubation program’s client companies and supports the incubator’s mission and operations

**Maintain** a management information system and collect statistics and other information necessary for ongoing program evaluation, thus improving a program’s effectiveness and allowing it to evolve with the needs of the clients

In summary, successful business incubators operate as a business, have a positive impact on a community, and provide a nurturing environment, hands-on assistance and a variety of services for start-up and fledgling firms during their most vulnerable years. Research has shown that incubator companies are much more likely to grow into viable job-creating businesses than startups without such support.
A business incubator’s main goal is to produce successful firms that will leave the program financially viable and freestanding.

During 2017, Oklahoma incubator managers were asked to complete a questionnaire to document their activities for the current reporting period. Based on the information received from the responding incubator managers:

- 862 full-time jobs provided by incubator tenants
- 163 small businesses are currently leasing space in Oklahoma’s small business incubators
- 163 OF INCUBATOR CLIENTS GRADUATE EACH YEAR
- 31 certified small business incubators are operating in Oklahoma, with tenants ranging from small service companies to high-tech research and development operations.
- 943 small businesses have located in a small business incubator, throughout the life of Oklahoma’s Certified Small Business Incubator Program.
- 476 have graduated from the program or relocated to a larger facility.
- 2,147 people are currently employed by 241 of the businesses that remained in the state.

These incubator graduates have the potential to create jobs, revitalize neighborhoods, commercialize new technologies, and strengthen local and national economies.
Productive Technologies
Launch Pad at FT
Edmond, Okla.

In 2005, entrepreneur Max Doleh built the first software to manage quality control for blood products in the U.S. The company then specialized in helping automate other areas of the blood industry. The effort was sustained with multiple grants from the state of Oklahoma including the Oklahoma Applied Research Support (OARS) program from Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST) and the Edge grant. This helped the company conduct more research and integrated blood management system. The funding also helped the company experiment with different approaches to new methods in quality control and compliance management.

By 2016, Productive Technologies had too many products and did not focus on profitability. There was no concentrated sales effort to capitalize on previous successes. The company had an opportunity to engage with MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston and help them with their quality control requirements for products and expanded to manage the quality management system for equipment and reagents. Instead of building modules to fit each requirement, Productive Technologies set out to build a next generation platform to manage any quality control process for any industry. The incubation process helped to eliminate many products and focus on developing PERFEQTA, a flexible platform that would allow business to translate their daily activities into business applications extremely fast without the need for software developers to code specialized software to address that need.

“Being part of the incubator has been integral to our success,” said Doleh. “We now have a sales and marketing strategy providing results in the

Shabby Chick
Duncan Center for Business Development
Duncan, Okla.

In August 2016, the Duncan Center for Business Development (DCBD) welcomed Shabby Chick Smart Clean, LLC. The DCBD renovated existing shop space for them to manufacture their all natural cleaning products, which they first sold at farmers markets then expanded to boutiques and mom-and-pop shops. Since then their business has continued to grow.

In 2017, Shabby Chick hired four employees and moved into a 6,000-square-foot facility with a large shop space to manufacture their products, along with multiple offices, a breakroom and conference room. Since relocating, they have remodeled their office space to fit their spunky personality and their building is now used to show off to other members of the community.

In the last year, Shabby Chick won the REI Women in Business Innovate Her Challenge, as well as the SCORE Championship. On October 23, 2017, Shabby Chick launched their all natural laundry soap on the Home Shopping Network and Amber Malcom, owner, got to present her product on national television. When they needed the extra workforce to manufacture the line needed for the HGTV launch, they hired individuals from The Power Shop, a company that helps handicapped individuals find jobs. Shabby Chick Smart Clean has been a great asset to the Stephens County community.

Owners, Jason and Amber, have told many people that starting their business in the DCBD incubator provided them with contacts to help with the advancement of their manufacturing process, and the owners have been speaking with the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance to help find equipment for their production process. They said that without the help of the DCBD they would not be as advanced in their process as they are now.
form of a growing number of PERFEQTA clients in multiple industries. Having expert business advice on demand and regular meetings to report our progress have helped immensely. Being a CEO is a lonely job and being able to share and learn from someone with many years of experience has proven effective and extremely valuable. We appreciate the opportunity to be part of the incubator and recommend it to others with ideas to nurture and grow.”

**SCiO 3D Sports**  
*Strate Center for Business Development*  
*Enid, Okla.*

Jim Shaughnessy, Master of Sports Science, Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS), is currently completing his Doctorate at The United States Sports Academy. He is a 25-year veteran United States Professional Tennis Association coach of professional players and international coaches, as well as NCAA team and individual champions. His expertise and love for the game led him to pursue his own business, SCiO 3D Sports. But to transition to the business world, Shaughnessy turned to the Strate Center for Business Development located at Autry Technology Center in Enid. There, he participated in the Entrepreneurs Inspire Bootcamp, an annual multi-session training designed to educate those interested in starting, expanding or operating a small business.

“The classes at Autry and the support of the Strate Center staff helped me develop a business plan which helped me organize what I was doing into something at which could make money,” said Shaughnessy.

Under Shaughnessy’s guidance, SCiO 3D Sports utilizes data analysis of 3D kinematics and visuals comparing the emerging player’s technique to the SCiO Digitized Library of the world’s top ranked ATP/WTA pros. SCiO 3D sports quantitative analysis reveals technique flaws that cannot be measured by super slow motion video or the naked eye, including measurements of motion at every instant of the action. Analysis is done during live competitive tournament play or on a private court. The player’s action is never restricted in any way with wires or markers. Once the emerging player’s strokes are captured and digitized into 3D, a scheduled consultation with Shaughnessy guides coaches and players through the 3D biomechanical analysis of the player’s swing and a prescription for technique adjustments and, if necessary, technique specific strength and conditioning exercises are developed. The 3D analysis from SCiO’s tennis scientists reveals information about a player’s game with quantities – not opinions.

**Log 10, LLC**  
*Pioneer Technology Center*  
*Ponca City, Okla.*

Log 10, LLC was formed in 2013 by Dr. Siobhan Reilly, and is a comprehensive food safety company. Their focus is food microbiology, and their name reflects the way microbe numbers are expressed (i.e., log base 10). The company produces probiotics that eliminate food-borne illness causing bacteria (pathogens such as, Salmonella, Listeria, E. coli, etc). Their products are utilized by both the human food and pet food industries for use in food and food processing environments.

The company’s operations include manufacturing and fermentation, as well as a state-of-the-art ISA 17025 accredited laboratory. In addition to probiotic production, Log 10 also offers microbiological analyses and a full range of HACCP and food safety consultation, research and auditing services.

Log 10, LLC graduated from the Pioneer Technology Business Incubator on September 15, 2017. They attributed a big part of their success to the incubator.

**MaxQ**  
*Meridian Technology Center for Business Development*  
*Stillwater, Okla.*

In early 2011, a team of Oklahoma State University (OSU) engineering students conceived the concept of a light-weight, super thin insulation for space-bound “cube” satellites. Operating under the name MaxQ, they took their idea to NASA, only to be turned down. However, NASA softened the rejection by offering
some insightful advice to the Oklahoma-based entrepreneurs: Seek more earthly applications.

“We were advised to apply our insulation concept on terrestrial packaging needs,” said Saravan Kumar, Ph.D., now CEO of Stillwater-based MaxQ. “The feedback from NASA encouraged us to compete for a different market.”

MaxQ’s founders set their sights on a new market, the nation’s blood collection industry. Today, MaxQ offers a comprehensive suite of validated, reusable or one-way systems for the blood collection, vaccine, pharmaceuticals and life sciences industries.

“Life-saving biological products like blood, vaccines and pharmaceuticals must be stored and transported within a specific cold chain,” Kumar said. “For instance, a unit of blood, which costs $250 to $500, must be maintained under precise temperatures during transport. Deviation from required temperature range during handling could potentially affect the viability of the blood unit leading to it being scrapped or, worse yet, lead to adverse clinical outcomes during transfusion.”

MaxQ’s packaging systems are employed by major hospitals and blood banks across the United States and Canada. The flourishing company was built as a Stillwater-based business, where it has access to students from OSU and Meridian Technology Center that have helped its growth. MaxQ’s founding partners validated their business plan and raised seed capital while still OSU students through a series of collegiate business plan competitions. MaxQ won second place in OSU’s Riata Business Plan competition, then won the Student Generated Technology Interview award in the Donald W. Reynolds Governor’s Cup, and was named a finalist in the competition.

The Governor’s Cup also introduced the company to Rod Whitson, a member of the SeedStep Angels group who served as a judge in the competition. Whitson was so impressed by the team of entrepreneurs that he is participating in the company’s Series A round as an investor.

“They were clearly a sharp team and were putting to use what they were learning in OSU’s entrepreneurial program,” Whitson said. “The progress the MaxQ team has made since OSU is nothing short of amazing. They have pivoted the company several times and now have isolated an uncontested market space.”

In 2012, MaxQ entered the Meridian Technology Center Business Incubator program, graduating in 2015 into their own facility located in Stillwater.

“Oklahoma represents a resource-rich startup ecosystem for entrepreneurs,” Kumar said. “We have access to vital resources such as technology development and accelerated research support from OCAST, product development and manufacturing support services offered by the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance, and most importantly, access to critical growth capital and mentoring resources provided by i2E.”

The company recently was awarded investment funds from i2E. “With this capital, our primary goal is to establish MaxQ as the leading total packaging solutions provider in the blood packaging industry” said Kumar.

MaxQ recently executed a multi-year purchase agreement with a major blood banking conglomerate and is in the process of establishing a national brand distribution agreement with Cardinal Health, which serves nearly 70 percent of the hospitals in the U.S.

The company also has broadened the horizons for its core insulation technology into the construction industry.

“Our core insulation technology is ideally suited for large scale volume needs such as structural insulation for mobile homes, refrigerated trucks, rail cars, and insulation for residential and commercial buildings,” said Balaji Jayakumar, Ph.D., MaxQ’s chief operating officer.
Oklahoma Certified Incubators

# Number of incubators in the area
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incubator</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of Businesses Targeted</th>
<th>Tenant Capacity</th>
<th>Current Number of Tenants</th>
<th>Computer Network</th>
<th>Phone Service</th>
<th>Business Planning</th>
<th>Marketing Assistance</th>
<th>Conference Room</th>
<th>Other Services Provided</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pontotoc Technology Business Development Center</td>
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<td>Service and LightMfg.</td>
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<td>Tenant Capacity</td>
<td>Current Number of Tenants</td>
<td>Support Services Offered</td>
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<td>Hemphill Create</td>
<td>Tulsa</td>
<td>Mfg.</td>
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<td>High Growth Mfg./Energy/Tech</td>
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Support Services Offered:
- Computer Network
- Phone Service
- Business Planning
- Marketing Assistance
- Conference Room

Other Services Provided:
- Industrial warehouse / manufacturing space and services such as cutting steel and forklift operation for tenants
- Milestone management, mentoring, business coaching