

Launch SA – City of San Antonio

Problem assessment, the challenge or need that prompted the local government to develop the program

In 2012, the City of San Antonio established a Small Business Task Force that consisted of business owners and community advocacy organizations to develop strategies to spur new business growth and promote existing small businesses within the City. The taskforce identified three key strategies. The first strategy is to establish a culture of entrepreneurship throughout the community for both adults and youth. The second strategy is to increase coaching and mentoring for future and existing small business owners. The taskforce's third strategy recognized the value of existing business resources in San Antonio and the need to increase marketing of those resources to existing small businesses. To pursue these strategies, City staff developed Launch SA, a physical space in the San Antonio Central Library that features entrepreneurship programming and business resources, in partnership with a managing community partner.

To identify the managing partner, the City of San Antonio's Economic Development Department sought a firm that would assist with the development and execution of Launch SA and ensure the goals and mission of the Small Business Taskforce were met. LiftFund (formerly Accion Texas) was selected for their experience with entrepreneurship and business development, mentoring and apprenticeship programs, and ability to foster entrepreneurship among youth. Most importantly, the firm has a commitment to build relationships between resource partners and entered with proven success in leveraging private funding to ensure sustainability.

The Central Library location identified for the Launch SA program includes a 10,000 square-foot open space concept that was aimed to encourage collaboration and social activity, while also establishing multiple hubs where small groups can meet and vet ideas on full wall white boards or plug into media outlets to present information visually using technology. Large meeting areas were also included to accommodate large programming events.

Since its opening in January 2013, Launch SA has assisted more than 13,000 local entrepreneurs and small business owners, with growth occurring weekly. With more than 35,000 small businesses in Bexar County (according to the U.S. Small Business Administration size standards), the need for a one-stop space like Launch SA was crucial. Business owners now have a central location to meet to support one another through peer to peer interactions, to attend educational workshops, and to receive the mentorship offered by successful entrepreneurs that will lead to a path of success. Whether a mentor, a small business owner, or a resident with an idea to create a startup, Launch SA is ready to move forward businesses at all levels.

Program implementation and costs:

Approximately \$1.3 million was spent to construct and finish the space. City funding to LiftFund for the management of Launch SA totaled \$800,000, with the requirement that LiftFund provide matching funds. Launch SA also applies for grants and sponsorships throughout the year to support and grow various programs. Last year, the center received a total of \$217,900 from entities such as Bexar County, Chick-fil-A, Bank of America, The Hartford, Rackspace, and more.

With this funding system, Launch SA provides an array of programming, including:

- **Venture Challenge:** this program challenges entrepreneurs to create and achieve personalized business milestones, with a winning entrepreneur awarded a \$40,000 prize to further develop their team, product, and company. During the last venture challenge, more than 80 entrepreneurs participated and received support from Launch SA resource providers. This year more than 130 participated.
- **1 Million Cups/Pitch Tab:** these programs allow local entrepreneurs an opportunity to present their business ideas to an audience of fellow entrepreneurs, advisors, and mentors via live presentation with audience feedback and questions. Over 2,000 entrepreneurs attend 1 Million Cups and Pitch Tab each year for guidance.
- **Break Fast and Launch:** a culinary business accelerator in San Antonio that works one-on-one with entrepreneurs and startups in the culinary industry to provide accounting, marketing, and real estate and business plan creation. 31 companies have launched since the program began in 2015.
- **San Antonio Entrepreneurship Week:** A five day showcase of the various industries that make San Antonio unique, while highlighting the entrepreneurs and the businesses that are creating positive changes in our community. The last event saw over 1,150 attendees and 85 subject matter experts who gave various presentations.

Tangible results or measurable outcomes of the program:

Launch SA is achieving the Small Business Task Force's strategy to help entrepreneurs and small business owners, as shown through these outcomes from January 1, 2016 to December 31,

2016.

- Attendees, Unique Walk-ins & Website Visitors - 30,831
- Referrals - 4,945
- Resource Partners - 88
- Business Consulting Hours - 1,388
- Businesses Created - 32
- Jobs Created – 258
- Organizations Hosted Events & Training Sessions – 160
- Entrepreneurs Presenting at Pitch Events - 225

Lessons learned during planning, implementation, and analysis of the program:

Working in a rapidly growing city such as San Antonio, Launch SA has had to learn to adapt to the needs of the growing entrepreneurial ecosystem. Such growth has brought about rapidly emerging and exciting actors who also promote entrepreneurship. Each entrepreneur has a unique idea, and although their needs are often similar, the business stages and industries vary among them. Launch SA has learned to continuously survey small businesses on an individual level. Regularly collected survey data has improved programming and spurred the creation of new programs to create an individualized experience for every entrepreneur that visits Launch SA.

How the program raises awareness of the contributions of Local Government Managers:

Under the leadership of City Manager Sheryl Sculley, the Economic Development Department

continues to drive the entrepreneurial progress in the City. For example, the Small Business Liaison, a City employee located at Launch SA, serves as the first stop for business startup assistance and serves as an ongoing resource for growing businesses. The City also works in collaboration with Launch SA to produce events like the upcoming Small Business Festival, which is a week-long initiative focused on bringing the business community together to generate momentum for entrepreneurs. These contributions greatly impact the City's small business community and advancement of local entrepreneurs, and we look forward to continuing this progress.