

CASE STUDY

Engagement of Students and Academic Staff in Climate Action Activities at Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
2. CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES.....	3
3. THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGING STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF IN CLIMATE ACTION.....	4
4. TAILORING PROGRAMS TO THE INTERESTS AND EXPERTISE OF STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF.....	5
5. FOSTERING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION, PROJECT-BASED LEARNING, AND HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES.....	5
6. RAISING AWARENESS AND ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION AMONG STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF.....	6
7. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES.....	6
8. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS.....	8

1. INTRODUCTION

The Business Incubator Innovation Challenge is a structural subdivision of Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University. It aims to assist start-up entrepreneurs in developing their projects from ideation to commercialization. The primary goal of the Business Incubator is to provide support to entrepreneurs at different stages of their venture formation.

2. CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

The main objectives of the Business Incubator are:

1. Preparation for the implementation of their own business ideas and the formation of effective professionals ready for practical work;
2. Promoting entrepreneurial culture among young people;
3. Formation of an ecosystem of startups at the University;
4. Increasing the effectiveness of communication in the system "education-science-business-government-civil society";
5. Creation of preconditions for the development of socially responsible and innovatively active own micro, small, medium and large businesses as the basis for economic development.

As for the main goals of the Business Incubator Innovation Challenge under the ILCA project, it is worth noting that these goals are aimed at creating an effective platform that promotes the development of innovative solutions in the field of climate action and actively involves students and teachers in this process:

1. Stimulating innovation: encouraging and supporting students' innovative business ideas in the field of climate change. Creating conditions for the development of innovative concepts and technologies aimed at environmental improvement.
2. Start-up development: support for and development of start-ups that have the potential to address specific climate change issues, as well as promoting entrepreneurship and turning ideas into successful eco-business projects.
3. Ecosystem building: creating an ecosystem that brings together students, academic staff, practitioners and experts in the field of climate action. Providing a favourable environment for the exchange of ideas, experiences and resources.
4. Organisation of competitions and events: holding ecotones, thematic events and meetings to promote innovation and development of business projects in the field of climate change.

5. Implementation of initiatives: Implementation of initiatives and programmes aimed at promoting environmental awareness, efficient use of resources and development of sustainable lifestyles.

6. Collaboration with partners: establishing partnerships and cooperation with industry companies, NGOs and government agencies to support and implement innovative projects aimed at climate change.

The Business Incubator Innovation Challenge of Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, along with business representatives of the Chernivtsi region (Bukovyna Entrepreneurs Club, Chernivtsi Business Group, Business Club RIST, IT Cluster Community, LBC Chernivtsi, Inside Business Club), and representatives of financial institutions (JSC CB "Privatbank", JSC "Oschadbank", JSC "Credit Agricole Bank", JSC "Raiffazen Bank", JSC "Ukreximbank") signed a declaration. This declaration established the Business Incubator as a key element of the innovation infrastructure.

The purpose of this initiative is to promote entrepreneurial and financial culture among young people. It also aims to improve communication between the education, science, business, government, and civil society sectors, as well as to form a startup ecosystem. Additionally, it seeks to transform innovative student ideas into knowledge-intensive products and create favourable conditions for start-up development by providing organizational, administrative, informational, consulting, and scientific support.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGING STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF IN CLIMATE ACTION

The importance of engaging students and academic staff in addressing climate change within the Business Incubator is crucial, as it helps to create innovative and effective solutions to environmental challenges. Involving the academic community in this process has several key advantages.

First, students, as future leaders and professionals, have the opportunity to study, analyse and implement innovative ideas in the field of sustainable development. Their research and projects can form the basis for the development of environmentally conscious business models and technologies.

Secondly, as experts in their fields, academic staff can provide support and guidance to student initiatives, facilitating the creation of a community of practice and knowledge sharing. They can also integrate climate change issues into the curriculum and promote environmental awareness among students.

Finally, the Business Incubator can help turn student ideas into real projects and start-ups. This not only stimulates the entrepreneurial spirit, but also helps to create innovative solutions to environmental problems.

By engaging students and academic staff, the Business Incubator fosters a responsible approach to the environment, establishes a platform for joint action, and generates the innovation required for sustainable development.

4. TAILORING PROGRAMS TO THE INTERESTS AND EXPERTISE OF STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF

The Business Incubator's programme development aims to create an engaging environment for students and academic staff, considering their interests, skills and areas of expertise in climate action and eco-business. This process begins with a thorough analysis of the individual needs and priorities of the participants, which allows us to identify the areas of the programmes that best meet their expectations.

The creation of interdisciplinary groups, partnerships with business and the organisation of innovative events stimulate active participation and exchange of ideas in the context of eco-business. Supporting start-ups, integrating climate topics into curricula, and organising training seminars make participation in programmes more accessible and informative, contributing to the formation of sustainable development principles in eco-business.

In addition, technological innovations are supported and information resources are created for participants' self-development in the field of climate science and eco-business. These strategies help not only to attract but also to implement specific ideas and projects aimed at addressing climate challenges and creating successful eco-business solutions.

5. FOSTERING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION, PROJECT-BASED LEARNING, AND HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES

The incorporation of interdisciplinary collaboration within the Business Incubator programmes is a key factor in creating a stimulating environment that engages students and academic staff. By pooling knowledge and competencies from different fields, students from various faculties and academic staff from different departments interact and complement each other. This fosters a creative exchange of ideas and broadens participants' perspectives, contributing to a deeper understanding of climate issues and the stages of start-up development.

Project-based learning introduces practical components where participants work on specific tasks and real business projects within a sustainable development context. This approach allows for the application of theoretical knowledge, skill development in practical conditions, and contributions to solving environmental problems.

Hands-on experiences provide opportunities to participate in the creation of eco-start-ups, initiatives, and real business projects. This practical involvement not only enhances theoretical understanding of climate change but also actively engages students in addressing these issues. It fosters a sense of self-efficacy and highlights the importance of individual contributions to global climate efforts.

This integrated approach, combining interdisciplinarity, project-based learning, and hands-on experiences, is an effective mechanism for engaging participants in various activities organised by the Business Incubator.

6. RAISING AWARENESS AND ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION AMONG STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF

A variety of strategies are employed to raise awareness and encourage participation among students and academic staff in the Business Incubator's activities. Information campaigns and publications are used to create materials and blogs that announce events. News and updates are posted on the Business Incubator's official website and on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to ensure maximum reach and engagement.

The organisation of thematic events, including coworking sessions, networking opportunities, training workshops, conferences, business forums, and company tours, plays a key role in raising awareness and stimulating participation. These events allow experts and business representatives to share their experiences while providing participants with practical skills. They serve as both advertisement and motivation for future participants to join the incubation programmes.

By employing these methods, the Business Incubator fosters an active and practical environment that encourages participation and supports the development of eco-businesses. This approach not only raises awareness but also actively engages students and academic staff in meaningful climate action activities.

7. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

The Business Incubator participants hold regular meetings with representatives of the business community, including the Bukovyna Entrepreneurs Club, Chernivtsi Business Group, RIST Business Club, LBC Chernivtsi, IT Cluster Community, Inside Business Club, IGEN Business Club, representatives of financial institutions and other partners.

Throughout the incubation programme, students and academic staff have the chance to engage in face-to-face consultations with these entrepreneurs and

partners. Following these interactions, the entrepreneurs often take on mentorship roles, guiding and supporting student business ideas.

As for successful projects that demonstrate the joint efforts of students, teachers and external stakeholders, it is worth noting that a grant of more than UAH 1.5 million was won from international organisations with the support of the Charitable Foundation «Rockada». It is intended to create a Digital Hub on the basis of the Business Incubator Innovation challenge at the Yuriy Fedkovych National University. This project provides additional opportunities for students to implement their business ideas and become start-ups and successful entrepreneurs.

Yana Melnyk, a student of the Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University and a participant of the Business Incubator Innovation challenge programme, received a microgrant to start her own business as part of the state government grant programme eRobota.

The participation of students of the Business Incubator Innovation Challenge in the business forum "Modern Business in Bukovyna: State Financial Programmes and International Initiative" opened up significant prospects for them. At this event, they had the opportunity to participate in trainings from entrepreneurs who had successfully received a grant to start their own business. A large number of micro-entrepreneurs shared their interesting experiences and emotions, and pointed out the possibilities of cooperation with the Business Incubator Innovation Challenge at the Yuriy Fedkovych National University. This event opened up unique opportunities for young people and students to receive financial, organisational and advisory support for their business projects.

Launched in October 2023, the programme "From Business Idea to Microgrant for Starting Your Own Business" has enrolled around 100 students from various faculties. It consists of three modules:

- Module 1: Focuses on unlocking entrepreneurial potential and formulating business ideas. Participants receive motivational advice for beginners, take part in workshops, and engage in interactions with business representatives. A key aspect of this module is the algorithm for starting a business, including idea generation, success factors for start-ups, and aspects of innovatively active and socially responsible business practices.
- Module 2 (Deadline March 2024): Aims at developing business ideas into concrete plans. Participants will study business model frameworks, create and refine business plans, and delve into marketing, brand management, design, advertising, and small business management.
- Module 3 (Deadline May 2024): Focuses on obtaining financial support for start-ups, researching funding sources, learning legal aspects of business, and testing market opportunities. Participants will also have the chance to present

their projects at pitching sessions with business representatives and financial institutions.

These examples showcase the successful collaboration between students, academic staff, and external stakeholders in fostering entrepreneurial and innovative activities within the Business Incubator.

8. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS

So, let's summarise the primary conclusions and key points of the Business Incubator Innovation Challenge at Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University:

Mission and success criteria: The Business Incubator has a clearly defined mission to foster innovative entrepreneurship among students and faculty. Its success is measured not only by the number of new start-ups created but also by the focus on environmentally oriented ventures.

Multidisciplinary approach: The programme promotes a multidisciplinary approach, engaging participants from various professional fields to develop innovative and integrated solutions. This includes collaboration among teachers from different departments and entrepreneurs from diverse business sectors.

Partnerships: Successful partnerships with business, grant-making organisations and the public sector are crucial for providing the necessary resources and support to participants.

Innovation and climate change: The programme encourages the development of innovations and business projects specifically aimed at addressing climate change challenges.

Learning and development: Systematic educational activities, including trainings, seminars, and workshops, are conducted to enhance participants' key skills and knowledge.

Eco-business and social responsibility: Promoting the development of eco-business and socially responsible initiatives is marked by the active implementation of climate action in entrepreneurial projects.

Financial and technical support: Providing financial and technical support to start-ups through grants, consultancy and access to infrastructure;

Efficiency and critical factors: The success of the programme relies on effective management, participants' willingness to self-develop, and their readiness to embrace innovation.

The Business Incubator Innovation Challenge at Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University serves as a prime example of a successful initiative that merges education, entrepreneurship, and social responsibility.