

Entrepreneurship and incubators in Canada

The concept of business incubation started in the USA in the 1960s and expanded to Canada and elsewhere in the form of innovation centers, technology parks, science parks, and business support centers in the 1980s. Typically, business incubators support the entrepreneurial process by providing workspace, equipment and facilities, and other services to help increase survival rates for innovative start-ups. Worldwide, the USA, Canada, and Australia have taken the lead in setting up such incubators. In 2005, there were 83 business incubators in Canada, and the demand for their services exceeds their capacity. The high survival rate of new start-ups in Canada is largely due to the efficient support from state-owned, private, and university-affiliated technology incubators.



CRC Innovation Centre presentation

Many APO member countries have adopted the incubation concept and established such centers in recognition of the importance of SMEs, which start-ups invariably are, to economic development. However, those initiatives have not motivated effective participation by small businesses, hampering the contribution of incubators to entrepreneurial development and thus ultimately overall economic development. Therefore, the APO organized a study mission to Canada, 26–30 November, in collaboration with SENES Consultants Limited, a global company headquartered in Ontario. The mission aimed to learn from successful Canadian experiences in business incubation and entrepreneurship development, which has garnered wide support from the business community, universities, and the federal government while accelerating economic and industrial development.



On the road again: discussing issues and plans in Canada

Twenty professionals from 10 Asian countries representing business and scientific organizations, government departments, incubation centers, and would-be entrepreneurs gathered in icy Toronto on 26 November to visit the Canada-Ontario Business Service Center, which is jointly managed by Industry Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. Ontario's small business community benefits from this easy

access to government programs, services, and regulatory authorities. The next visit was to the Markham Innovation Synergy Center, supported by the town of Markham, National Research Council, and Ontario Ministry of Innovation. Since its inception, it has become the first stop for business information in Ontario including diagnostic services, business mentoring, review of financial resources, networking among peers, market intelligence research, etc.

On the second day, participants had the opportunity to visit the Ontario Centre of Excellence (OCE), founded in 1987, which is the preeminent research-to-commercialization vehicle in the province. The OCE assists emerging entrepreneurs by facilitating networking and encouraging partnerships among individuals and institutional researchers. It also assists researchers in accessing sources of funding and business expertise to achieve commercialization. Delegates then took a long trip to Ottawa.

The mission visited the Communication Research Canada (CRC) Innovation Centre on 28 November. The CRC Innovation Center helps dynamic young Canadian companies develop their business potential through on-site technology incubation and assisting high-tech SMEs. On 29 November, before traveling back to Toronto, the delegates observed incubating companies in information technology, multimedia, manufacturing technologies, and life sciences located at Centre d'Entreprises et d'Innovation de Montreal (CEIM) in Quebec province. The visit to the CEIM showcased an excellent example of how incubators can help small businesses during the initial years.

On the final day, three visits were made to the MaRS Centre, Centre for Business Entrepreneurship and Technology (CBET) of the University of Waterloo, and the Accelerator Incubation Centre, Waterloo, in Toronto. The delegates were exposed to the CBET's Master of Business, Entrepreneurship, and Technology flagship program for turning entrepreneurial-minded students into actual entrepreneurs. Participants were fortunate to observe the "(business) pitch competition" of budding entrepreneurs at the Accelerator Incubation Centre.

The study mission provided comprehensive, informative insights into business incubation and entrepreneurship development in Canada through the numerous site visits and presentations. The crammed schedule with long travel times did not hinder communication and exchanges of information among the enthusiastic participants. Group discussions and presentations were managed mostly on the road and during breaks and meals. Comaraderie and a passion for learning shielded participants from the icy blasts of the Canadian deep winter. 