

Innovation Lab Design Team
Final Report
November 2015

Despite its name, the Innovation Lab (IL) is not a specific physical or even virtual space, nor does it simply consist of a series of specific innovative projects. The IL is instead understood to be a function or process that may take a variety of forms. The IL is not necessarily one thing or one strategy, but a continuum of approaches, an ongoing and evolving process. Whatever we design must therefore remain iterative and emergent.

This is due to the fact that innovation does not lend itself to a defined path or particular method. There is no one right way to achieve a culture of innovation. Consequently, there is an inevitable friction between the requirement for a specific course of action, and the realization that innovation is itself unpredictable and fluid. It also means that the work of the IL will be characterized by an intentional ambiguity – an ambiguity that resists the constraints of premature structure in order to foster creativity.

Merriam-Webster makes a distinction between two senses of the word *innovation*. An innovation is: 1) “a new idea”, a specific idea that has the quality of being innovative. And, 2) innovation may be an “act or process of introducing new ideas” – rather than a particular idea, innovation may be a practice of experimentation, invention, testing limits, crossing boundaries and taking risks. To the extent that *an* innovation results from the *process* of innovation, the latter is more fundamental.

The IL can work both sides of this distinction. The IL can (eventually) nurture and support specific innovative projects; however, the IL’s first order of business will be to foster the process of innovation. This involves nothing less than transforming the culture within ARL to encourage greater risk-taking and creative thought processes. Identifying and nurturing specific innovative projects remains a priority, but as a second (later) order of business.

This focus on the process of innovation recognizes that the IL would not primarily be in the business of identifying already born projects, but would play a significant role in initiatives intended to surface new ideas. Some of the best ideas emerge from contexts in which diverse perspectives and slow hunches lead to unexpected insights. The IL can take intentional steps to create such synergistic environments within ARL.

1. Current programs and activities of the Association that fit within the scope of the Design Team:

- Innovation is not the exclusive domain of the Innovation Lab. It is the intent of the ARL Design process that all Design Teams engage in innovation. Overlap of the scope of the Innovation Lab with current programs and activities is inevitable and desirable. Ideally the Innovation Lab would draw upon and feed into innovative ideas and processes of all design teams, committees, etc.
- While innovation should be pervasive, the Innovation Lab is, however, unique in that it provides a dedicated focus on the processes of innovation and cultural change. Although all Design Teams will be engaging in cultural change within the Association, the Innovation Lab sees a role for itself in continuing the process of innovation that began with the Strategic Thinking & Design process.

- Given this focus, there is little in the way of existing programs or activities that would logically be folded in into the Innovation Lab. However, there are two committees the Innovation Lab sees itself collaborating substantially with:
 - The Innovation Lab has begun collaborating with the Member Engagement and Outreach Committee in designing processes at membership meetings intended to generate innovative ideas and creative connections.
 - The Innovation Lab would work closely with the Coordinating Committee to help maintain the flow of innovation. Ideas that emerge from the Innovation Lab might be taken up by other Design Teams, and vice versa. The Coordinating Committee would provide one of the key mechanisms for this flow of innovation.

2. Program/projects that are not within the scope of the Design Team:

- The IL does not see itself playing a significant role in providing a platform for sharing existing practices or projects of member institutions - regardless how innovative those programs or projects might be. There are already many existing opportunities for such sharing, both within ARL and in other professional contexts. The initial focus will be on idea generation.

3. Create a list of new projects that are emerging out of the Design Team conversations as of October 2015:

- Priority 1 (first order of business):
 - Collaborate with the Member Engagement and Outreach Committee to experiment with the format of membership meetings in order to spark more serendipitous conversations and exploratory lines of inquiry.
 - Include at least one activity hosted by the Innovation Lab at each membership meeting.
 - The IL hosted the “I’ve got a Hunch” session at the 2015 Fall ARL Membership Meeting. Members were invited to share brief “lightning strike” type presentations on emerging ideas for projects, programs, or lines of inquiry.
 - At subsequent membership meetings the IL will continue sessions that encourage members to share ideas, and we may build upon themes that emerge from the “Hunch” sessions.
 - Organize and host guest facilitators or from beyond librarianship to help shape and develop ideas, virtually or in person.
- Priority 2
 - Facilitate the incubation of promising seeds of ideas – these could emerge from facilitated Innovation Lab exercises (such as the “Hunch” session), or could be ideas that emerge elsewhere in other Design Teams.

Note: Although the IL has been specific about projects here, the Design Team believes it would be critically important for the IL to adapt to opportunities and changing circumstances. The Design Team and future structures should commit to giving ongoing attention to that strategic adjustment.

4. Rank the top three to five projects from the current and new that were presented to the membership in October:

- “I’ve Got a Hunch” session at the 2015 Fall ARL Membership Meeting. The IL Design Team solicited ideas for “hunches” that directors would like to present at the meeting. This session was followed by small group discussions (over lunch) for further exploration of the hunches. The purpose of the “hunch” exercise was to help foster a culture of creativity, innovation and idea generation.
- Draw from the first “Hunch” session to build themes for facilitated discussions at subsequent membership meetings. Discussions may be facilitated by ARL members or by guest facilitators external to ARL or the profession. Consider using unconference or “nominal group” techniques to help structure discussions.
- Ideas that emerge from the IL’s idea generation exercises (or from elsewhere, such as other Design Teams) would be candidates as test cases for incubation by the Innovation Lab. Incubation strategies would need to be tailored to the specific ideas that emerge, and cannot be specified in advance.

Update – November 8, 2015

Design Team Working Session (Membership Meeting, Oct. 6th)

- The working session meeting provided an opportunity for ARL meeting attendees to engage with the Innovation Lab design team. Much of the discussion involved exploring the role of the Innovation Lab in creating spaces for idea generation, particularly at ARL membership meetings, and the question of how and when to identify ideas for further incubation.

“I’ve Got a Hunch” Session (Oct. 7th)

- Five lightning strike sessions were presented in the Innovation Lab’s “I’ve Got a Hunch” session:
 - Aggregated Social Media Feeds for ARL Libraries, Joe Lucia, Temple University
 - Collaborative Approaches to Preserving Born-Digital Resources, Carol Mandel, New York University
 - Immersive 3-D Virtual Bookstacks, Catherine Quinlan, University of Southern California
 - Libraries Shore Up Wikipedia, Elliott Shore, Executive Director, ARL
 - Technology Incubation Space and Gallery, Andreas Orphanides, North Carolina State University
- The session was well received, and was covered by Inside Higher Ed: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/10/08/what-do-research-librarians-have-hunch-about>

Subsequent Developments

- There has been considerable interest in the Wikipedia idea - both from Wikipedia itself, and from a couple of research libraries that have expressed a willingness to engage. There is potential for this to serve as a test case for the Innovation Lab to incubate/cultivate an idea. Possible next steps: engage interested institutions; continue the conversation with Wikipedia; and frame a pilot project.
- Start-up company sparks & honey (<http://www.sparksandhoney.com/>) has expressed an interest in exploring the potential for collaboration with the

- Innovation Lab. There may be the possibility of setting up an exploratory meeting with sparks & honey in NYC in December.
- Several attendees at the Fall Membership Meeting described institutional strategies for the cultivation of innovation (e.g. Catherine Quinlan from USC, Kathleen O'Connell from NSERC, Brett Bobley from NEA). Possible initiative: identify examples of institutional strategies; interview key individuals; and collect models to help inform IL strategies.

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