

Biz Whiz: Biz Bodega has the answers you need



Have you ever needed a wise guide that grants you all the answers you need? Innovation Studio and One Neighborhood Builders have partnered to create Biz Bodega, which provides just that! Biz Bodega is a facility that offers the gift of free resources and assistance to local entrepreneurs and budding businesses who are either just beginning their journey or who are looking for guidance with more established businesses. It is a space that can be the perfect help for any business owner who is looking for tips and expertise from business specialists, as well as a variety of resources and services.

Cynthia Munrayos and **Walther Morales**, both specialists at Biz Bodega, provided insight into the creation and purpose of Biz Bodega.

Victoria Kaufman: How does Biz Bodega help the development of new businesses and upcoming entrepreneurs?

Cynthia Munrayos: We are working on a program that will help entrepreneurs and business owners that are working with the business that they need to improve. If they are trying to build a business, or if they just have an idea, they can come to us and we can help them. We are developing a program based on the niche of that community, and I think that the advantage that we have is that we are getting to know the people and the community. I think that is something very interesting that we are putting in our programs so we know what their background is, their education, all those demographics. I think that the numbers work, but getting to know the real person behind the numbers, that is even more important.

Walther Morales: Many of the programs [like this] are... like a cookie cutter kind of thing, and we are trying to deviate a little bit from that. We need to understand who they are and what their background is. We are not catering every program to each individual, but we are trying to know who the community is in order to get a better result for anything we do at Biz Bodega.

VK: Do you think that something like Biz Bodega has been missing in the Providence community?

CM: For somebody who has lived in Rhode Island for a while, I have never seen a project like this that is so open to communicate and meet with the community and to offer all these different kinds of services. I think that it is important to acknowledge the positions that people are in. For example, [for] a lot of people that have small businesses, sometimes it is a side gig, and a lot of times they are working their full time jobs and then also making time for their small businesses. So we are also open on Saturdays because it is kind of a one stop shop, we want people to come in here and if they need any type of help or service we can offer that to them, even on Saturdays.

WM: Based on my research and data, I can say that this is a missing link. There have been a lot of trials of programs that are trying to match what we want to build and create at Biz Bodega. However I think that what Biz Bodega is doing is something very important in the sense that we are using concepts of local economic development, trying to reactivate the economy, the local community.. So working with the use of existing resources in a given territory... that will work for stimulating and promoting economic growth. So it is not only a space. Yeah it looks nice and beautiful, you can come in and it is part of the community, but it is much more than that, it's like the economic growth of the community.

VK: What specific kinds of resources and services does Biz Bodega provide to the entrepreneurial community?

CM: Biz Bodega is also a coworking space. So we do want to open it up to the entrepreneurial community, anyone who could make use of the space. Whether that is to host an event, or just to come in here and use it. Another service that we offer is an entrepreneurship navigation, which is a 1 on 1 consultation to address any individual needs or focuses that the person is looking for, which Walther navigates and he is the one who runs it.

WM: Complementing Cynthia's point, we are working on specific programming tools and resources. For example we are working on making a three-week program for people to get the knowledge of how to build a business. How to just think of an idea. It may sound like many other places are doing it, however we are putting in your own secret sauce, and that is what makes us distinctive from all the other programs. We are developing a program that will help existing businesses just to improve and make it better and make a more self-sufficient model for them to generate income.

VK: Does a new business or any entrepreneur interested in Biz Bodega have to meet with a specialist to utilize the services or could they just walk in and use the space on their own?

CM: They can come in and if they specifically want to improve their business and they are looking for different services and tools, we offer that.

WM: The best part is that these are free resources as well. We are trying to go where people are... We want to gain people's confidence as well. And that is something that is very important. What I said about getting to know people, you need to know who you are working with. What are their expectations, their backgrounds? We are not just expecting people to come in. We are going to meet people where

they are.