

The following information is an excerpt from the Letter of Intent submitted to the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation in response to the RECODE Request for Proposals of Spring 2014.

Algonquin College

Concept Paper

History of Algonquin College in the Ottawa Valley

The Algonquin Experience is about building lasting connections and providing opportunities for growth and success. Students journey along their chosen paths furthering their careers or pursuing new challenges in a learning environment that extends in multiple directions. At Algonquin College the emphasis on community involvement, building relationships, and integrating technology creates a culture where students are encouraged and supported to build connections with industry leaders, alumni, and community partners and to explore linkages between hands-on and theoretical learning. Students are challenged to extend their postsecondary experience beyond the College walls and into the larger community. They are exposed to different ways of working, which broadens both their career and life perspective.

Originally founded in the 1960s, the Pembroke Campus of Algonquin College operated out of a small leased space and provided opportunities for retraining. As the demand for career-oriented education grew through the 1970s, the College responded by delivering full-time programming in Forestry, Business, Electronics, and Nursing. From humble beginnings with only 16 full-time students, the campus has grown over the past 45 years to a full-time student population of approximately 1,000 students.

In the fall of 2012, Algonquin College opened a new \$36-million waterfront campus situated on the banks of the majestic Ottawa River adjacent to the City of Pembroke's downtown. The Pembroke Campus offers students the opportunity to study at a 4-storey, 100,000 square foot building with modern facilities and a variety of full-time programming, including programs with a focus on health, community studies, business, technology, and outdoor training. The new waterfront location is a natural fit for unique outdoor programming, including Outdoor Adventure, Outdoor Adventure Naturalist, Environmental Technician, and Forestry Technician. This is a new beginning for the College, the City of Pembroke, and all of Renfrew County. The new facility has transformed the image of post-secondary education in the Ottawa Valley. The College is well positioned to respond to the labor market needs of employers and to expand programming to support the changing needs of the community. This is evidenced by the recent creation of a Construction Techniques program to support the provincial skilled trades shortage. The new campus project has been a catalyst for economic growth in the region, sparking new interest in the city's inner core, such as the development of a privately owned and operated student residence to support more than 40% of out-of-town students that attend the campus.

While no provincial government funding was secured for the capital costs of the new campus, the communities within Renfrew County played a significant role in bringing the project to fruition. Local communities raised \$2.5 million towards the project. The Algonquin College Students' Association donated more than \$4 million to build a gymnasium and fitness center for students, and the Government of Canada contributed \$3-million through the Enabling Accessibility Fund. The City of Pembroke donated land, a prized piece of waterfront property, to be home to the new building. Collectively, these contributions allowed the College to finance the remainder of the project.

Rural Social Entrepreneurship: Learning to Bootstrap in the Ottawa Valley

Located in the heart of the Ottawa Valley, Renfrew County is surrounded by rural and rugged landscapes. Geographically the largest county in Ontario, Renfrew County spans approximately 7,645 square kilometers and encompasses some of Canada's most pristine wilderness, bound by the shores of the historic Ottawa River in the east and bordered by Canada's oldest provincial park (Algonquin Park) in the west. In addition to the unique natural environment that affords opportunities for outdoor training and tourism activities, much of Renfrew County is highly industrialized, developed, and central to world-class employers and facilities. Historically, Renfrew County's economy was strong in manufacturing, agriculture, and forestry but in recent years there has been a broad shift to retail, healthcare and public administration, as well as increases in construction and real estate[1]. In its inception, Renfrew County was host to lumber and outdoor explores and adventures—individuals who found solutions to complex problems with few resources and forged a sense of identity and a future based on local resources. Renfrew County has been home to artistic inspiration from those painting from the shores of its mighty rivers like Tom Thompson and others from the Group of Seven who took inspiration from the wilderness.

Renfrew County has a total population of 101,326[2]. There are 18 municipalities, but the population is largely concentrated in four small urban service-centres: Arnprior, Renfrew, Pembroke, and Petawawa. The average age of residents in the County is 42.1[3] which exceeds the provincial average by 3 years and may result in both workforce shortages and increased demand on the County's health care system in the near future.

As in many rural communities in the province, Renfrew County is not as culturally or ethnically diverse as urban Ontario. The Aboriginal population in Renfrew County is considerably higher than the provincial average, largely because of the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn First Nation Community situated in the Golden Lake area. Recently a Local Immigration Partnership Committee has formed to identify gaps in services and to determine best practice for attracting newcomers to the region[4].

Garrison Petawawa is one of the largest garrisons in Canada. There has been significant growth as a result of the new helicopter squadron; simultaneously, there has been an increase in Canadian Forces personnel transitioning to civilian life. Algonquin College plays a major role in this transition, through Academic Upgrading and full-time studies. These transitioning personnel possess much life experience and history and are an asset to the communities in which they live.

Currently, Renfrew County is looking at how to retain these individuals by exploring strategies that would provide these personnel with small-business training and/or seed funding to start up new ventures and remain in the region.

The average earning in Renfrew County is \$41,059, 13% lower than the national average in annual earnings[5]. The economy is unique in that as few as seven employers employ more than 500 employees, and these organizations are largely publicly funded. Approximately 98% of Renfrew County's economy is driven by small businesses[6]. Transportation is one of the largest barriers to economic growth in the region. For example, the city of Pembroke recently lost its public transit service, the only such service that had operated in Renfrew County.

Given its large geography and its socio-economic landscape, Renfrew County has the potential to lead rural communities in developing social enterprises that support economic development and social well-being through a broader collaboration with Algonquin College. The College has expertise to lead this initiative, and is well positioned to take on an incubation leadership role by providing Academic and Applied Research support. Furthermore, the demographic makeup of the community and the role the College plays in supporting learning, offers an opportunity to create a bold vision for social innovation and the fostering of social entrepreneurship in a location with ample opportunity, strong and committed community partners and a willingness to take a bold leap to build a vision for the future that emerges from a willingness to try, to experiment and to explore new ways of thinking and doing to solve complex social problems.

Renfrew County developed from a history and past of fostering explorers and adventurers; Algonquin College in the Ottawa Valley wishes to partner with the McConnell Foundation to create a new model for social entrepreneurship for rural communities that will foster and support thinking and experimentation in finding new solutions to complex problems and ones that are geared to the more than 50 % of Canada's geographic landmass—those living in sparse, rural centres.

Why ACOV? Why Now?

Algonquin College in the Ottawa Valley (ACOV) is truly a community college that provides outreach services to people of all ages through the delivery of full-time, part-time, continuing education, apprenticeship, and academic upgrading programming. The College also delivers several services on behalf of the province of Ontario, including Employment Services, the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers and Labour Market Planning for the region of Renfrew and Lanark Counties.

Studying at the Pembroke Campus offers students a unique opportunity to gain quality post-secondary education in a rural setting. In less than fifty years, the College has responded to community needs by expanding programming and diversifying the range of offerings available to students. The College currently offers 19 full-time programs with a range of qualifications, degree through 1-year College certificates. The College has had strong programming in healthcare and forestry since its inception and over time has evolved as a leader in community studies, business, and outdoor training.

The unique, rural location affords students with a passion for the natural environment opportunities for post-secondary education in Outdoor Adventure, Outdoor Adventure Naturalist, Forestry Technician, and Environmental Technician. Approximately 50% of the College's students are from out-of-town; the unique programming is one of the main attributes that attracts students to study in the Ottawa Valley.

The College regularly participates in community consultation and partner discussions as well as ongoing professional development and collaboration with leaders in education across the country. The College values student feedback as evidenced in the regular student focus groups, KPI and satisfaction surveys that take place during and after students study at the College. In recent faculty and student focus groups it has become evident that both students and faculty desire more collaboration with community partners, the opportunity to make a significant contribution to their community and the chance to make a difference on both the local and global level. Furthermore, recent discussions of social enterprise in rural communities at the community level have identified a gap in the current state of rural social enterprise.

Specific to social enterprise, Algonquin College is developing capacity in this area most recently through the designing and implementation of a feasibility study, supported in part by Renfrew County Community Futures, and in partnership with Capacity Canada and expertise from Communitech, to explore and research models of college-led social enterprise incubators. Through this process, the College has already engaged in community conversations regarding the possibility of working collaboratively to bring attention to social enterprise in Renfrew County and the Ottawa Valley.

Algonquin College in the Ottawa Valley creatively builds industry partnerships to solve complex problems. This is true through our history of Applied Research at the campus and also in our desire to forge unique industry partnerships. For example, ACOV is the only post-secondary institution to have a formalized partnership with the Canadian Wildlife Federation—benefitting students, faculty and researchers at the CWF alike. These industry partnerships emerge to address teaching and research challenges and also to address specific community and business challenges. We have a culture and history of saying yes when approached to partners and we feel a deep sense of commitment to working with others to achieve a shared purpose.

We are seen as a leader in rural post-secondary education in Canada—most recently we hosted the first ever Rural Symposium for the Association of Community Colleges of Canada. We were recognized by our peers as a leader in this conference and have showcased nationally how a small rural college can work with its municipal and civil society partners to find solutions for our rural realities. We believe that we are well-suited to partner with the McConnell Family Foundation to continue to build on this culture and to be a rural learning lab within the next four years.

Concept Proposal and Initiatives

Through the proposed initiatives, the College and its community partners aspire to focus on rural realities, to speak to the lack of dialogue nationally regarding rural communities and opportunities for social enterprise, to build a model for rural social enterprise that can be applied to rural communities across the country, to root learning locally and extrapolate it globally, and to build a culture of new young leaders who will lead a social change movement in small rural locations.

The proposed activities align with existing College initiatives including on-campus committees focused on sustainability and inclusion in the College community. These committees include student and faculty Sustainability Committees, an Enterprise Committee, and a student-led Circle K Club (Kiwanis). In addition, students and faculty are engaged in applied research projects, many of which are connected to local employers and/or non-profit agencies and social services. The College also has expertise in outdoor training and offers students a unique product in the form of post-secondary education with a focus on the natural environment through one of its niche program areas. Lastly the proposed initiatives align with the ongoing social enterprise community consultation and feasibility study currently underway at the Pembroke Campus.

We believe that we are well-situated to be a learning lab for other rural communities that face similar economic, cultural and social challenges. We know that rural communities across the country provide access to agriculture as well as support unique economic livelihoods—yet these ways of life are being slowly cut off and, in many ways, disenfranchised. We believe that we have the capacity, through the development of a number of initiatives, to co-create solutions to common challenges and barriers faced by those living in more rural and remote communities—our intention is to test and pilot a series of solutions that can be extrapolated to other rural communities or those who have an interest in designing solutions for these populations. Examples of the social, economic and health problems facing rural communities are immense—for example, rural out-migration, especially with youth populations is creating significant demographic challenges, especially disproportionate numbers of older people in rural communities. Other examples include the ability of these locations to address the decline of their downtowns, with the rise of large box stores and the deterioration of solid, good-paying jobs. Each of these examples poses opportunities to rethink and redesign solutions to rural ways of life—to challenge the status quo and to build the capacity for problem-solving and pilot-testing in complex environments.

This concept paper proposes the following initiatives:

- **Rural Creativity & Design-Thinking Culture Camp:** Develop, plan and pilot a three-week creativity and design-thinking camp that provides training and learning to students in modalities such as design-thinking, rural enterprise, rural ways of life, rural challenges, and opportunities in rural communities. Applications will be sought from young adults (ages 19-40) across the country and 16 students will be selected. Following the three-week on-site camp, students will be supported virtually over the year to incubate and develop their social

enterprise initiatives. Seed funding in the amount of \$4,000-\$8,000 per project will be available to support new ventures, allowing students to experiment with social innovation and entrepreneurship. Students will receive coaching in social enterprise thinking over the course of the year from leaders in social enterprise. They will have the opportunity to participate in online training (e.g. MOOC courses) throughout the year. Students will also be engaged in collaboration with social entrepreneurs at other campuses and community-based hubs across the country. The camp will take place across five locations in the Ottawa Valley, which may include but are not limited to: Algonquin Park, Wilderness Tours, Rainbow Heritage Farm, Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn, and Algonquin College. The outcome of the development, design and piloting of this Rural Culture Camp will be that students will begin to pilot and test new ways of addressing complex challenges. Students will gain appreciation and insights into the variation and complexity of rural ways of life and will begin prototyping new solutions that can be developed and strengthened over time. Similarly, this cohort will have the collective ability to raise a consciousness and awareness about rural social enterprise and potential models that require further investigation.

- **Design Rural Social Incubator & Social Enterprise Lab:** Design, map, and plan a rural social incubator and social enterprise lab in Renfrew County, including the establishment of a social innovation zone on-campus at ACOV. The design process will involve community consultation as well as discussion with leaders in rural social enterprise locally and from across the country. The design process will explore existing models, internationally, as well as those nationally with a rural focus. It will include design of the physical space, and considerations to address the unique barriers in rural communities (e.g. transportation). Leveraging technology and exploring models for virtual hubs and mobile hubs will be reviewed. Community consultation will include an assessment of community needs and assets, the identification of student learning opportunities and College-led initiatives, and the development of curriculum to support a PSE certificate in social enterprise. Although there is some activity in this area, we believe that we are well-situated to become an incubator space and that our geographic location and relationships with our community partners will support not only students but others including practitioners and other researchers with an interest in this area.
- **Develop Rural Social Enterprise Thought Leadership (Rural Non-Profit Enterprise Advisory Committee and Social Cause Leadership Diploma):** Develop an advisory committee and host consultation meetings with national thought leaders on rural social enterprise from across Canada. Identify leaders from eight to twelve rural communities with successful examples of rural enterprises. Engage the advisory committee, leaders in rural social enterprise, and leaders in successful urban social enterprise (e.g. PLAN Canada, SiG Waterloo, CSI, etc.) to build a mentorship program for new rural social entrepreneurs (e.g. to mentor/coach students in the 3-week thought-camp, the Rural Non-Profit Enterprise and Social Cause Leadership Diploma, and community partners). Utilize expertise in advisory committee as well as research to design a rural enterprise diploma. Commission and publish

several small research papers on the state of rural social economy and social enterprise in Canada based on the discussion at the advisory committee consultation meetings.

- **Social Enterprise Perspective: Faculty Boot Camp:** Design a faculty boot camp to engage faculty in rethinking curricula from a social enterprise perspective. Develop a MOOC to train faculty on a national and international level.

Initially the work will be led by College leadership and a social enterprise advisory committee. The College leadership team will include representation by the Academic Chairs. The social enterprise advisory committee will be made up of leaders from rural communities who have demonstrated successful examples of rural enterprise as well as representation/mentorship from leaders in successful urban social enterprise. Over time, College faculty and students will be engaged in the process and community champions will be identified to help lead the initiatives. Currently the Academic Chairs, several College faculty, and select community partners are champions for this initiative. Alumni and student champions will be recruited in the Fall and Winter semesters. There will also be participation in the development and implementation of all elements of the project with a number of other resources not physically located on this campus—in particular: the Office of Applied Research, the Entrepreneur in Residence at Woodroffe, and expertise across other campuses.

The broader picture or shared vision between these partners will theoretically shift the current model of leadership/culture to one in which collaboration; sharing, idea-exchange, and networking, are at the core. Over time, social entrepreneurs – students, community partners, faculty, and small business will self-select action teams to tackle larger, complex social issues based on their shared interests. Resources can be pooled and expertise shared. As the culture changes, leadership will shift among team-members as the project(s) or initiative(s) mature.

In an effort to sustain the initiatives proposed in this submission, the College will identify a fundraising development strategy and a long term revenue development strategy.

If funded, the initiatives will establish a national network of thought leaders with a focus on rural social enterprise and a mentorship program that faculty and community will have access to. The culture on campus will shift to include more collaboration and sharing of ideas with community and national partners, as well as with faculty and industry professionals. Faculty will be trained on rural social enterprise and will be encouraged to rethink curricula from a social enterprise perspective. The next generation of students will have the opportunity to learn about social enterprise through the new Rural Non-profit Enterprise and Social Cause Leadership diploma program as well as through online MOOCs

The initiatives proposed in this concept paper are the result of community consultation, partner discussions, consultant discussion, student and faculty focus groups, a review of results from existing models in Canada, a review of an existing concept paper, and background research on social entrepreneurship, social innovation, and social enterprise.