

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.

# Kwantlen Polytechnic University

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overarching goal of this letter of intent to the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation's RECODE funding initiative is to develop the resources and focus that will weave together a suite of activities into a Social Innovation Zone that spans across the KPU campus. KPU occupies a unique niche amongst higher education institutions in B.C., both given the multicultural and socially dynamic municipalities it serves, and the organic development of a focus on community that has become a defining feature of the institution. We propose a set of activities that span disciplines and sectors and will:

- *expand* and deepen our community engagement by: a) strengthening the capacity of a campus incubator and accelerator for social innovation (CIR:CLE), b) providing baseline data on the community service learning underway, and c) developing our community-based research networks, thereby expanding our significant positive social impact;
- *document* social innovation and community engagement at KPU by promoting an institution-wide culture of storytelling supported by the development of visual media skills and access;
- *measure* community academic engagement by contributing to the development of new qualitative metrics that feed into national knowledge networks; and
- *celebrate* community engagement by markedly increasing its visibility on campus and by exploring the opportunity to develop a new social innovation lab in partnership with the City of Surrey and others.

Vision 2018, our current strategic plan, envisions that “the impact of KPU’s community engagement has doubled by 2018.” We believe that the integration of the above activities into a campus-wide Social Innovation Zone will allow us to do this in a meaningful and impactful way that truly leads community-level social innovation and change.

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## INTRODUCTION

Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) is a community-focused institution with a student body of 18,000. The university is characterized by a highly diverse, multicultural student population and close partnerships with its surrounding communities.

KPU’s main campus is located in Surrey, B.C. – the province’s second-largest city, comprised of nearly 500,000 residents. Located in the greater Vancouver area, Surrey is one of Canada’s fastest growing municipalities and one of the most diverse cities in the country. Over the last 20 years, the city has witnessed rapid growth through immigration, and visible minorities now comprise some 46% of the population.<sup>1</sup> One in five Surrey residents live in poverty, with levels particularly high amongst recent immigrants, youth, women, and aboriginal peoples (who make up 1.9% of the population). Surrey’s social infrastructure has not been able to keep pace with the changes, and associated social problems include crime, gang violence and homelessness. Other KPU campuses are in Richmond,

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<sup>1</sup> 2006 Census

which features an immigrant population of 60%; and in the more rurally-oriented Cloverdale and Langley where agriculture plays a significant role in the local economy.

Shaped by its setting, KPU is both mandated to “recognize and respond to challenges and opportunities within the dynamic communities of the Fraser region of British Columbia,” and “promotes leadership by developing and supporting community-based initiatives that address economic, social, and cultural issues within an increasingly global context.”<sup>2</sup>

## EXISTING SOCIAL INNOVATION INITIATIVES

**Community engagement** “Community engagement is one of the major innovations that has occurred in higher education over the last 20 years.”<sup>3</sup> KPU today features one of the highest levels of community engagement among B.C. universities, involving both a suite of experiential learning programs and community-based research. Our particular teaching and research strengths are the backdrop to this engagement, spanning domains from Criminology to Environmental Protection to Sustainable Agriculture, for example.

**Community Service Learning** KPU’s strength in community service learning has developed organically and autonomously (in the absence of a special mandate or specific resources), across all sectors, over the course of the institution’s transition from a college to a polytechnic university.<sup>4,5</sup> In the Faculty of Arts alone, approximately one-third of our 200 faculty are active in, or interested in engaging with, some form of interdisciplinary or community work. Our small class sizes mean that classes cater well to student needs and interests. In the Faculty of Arts, ten community service learning (CSL) courses ran this past academic year, allowing more than 300 students to volunteer outside of the classroom, completing over 8,000 hours of volunteer work. CSL activities are also underway in the School of Business where courses with service learning components have been running here for more than seven terms, and two upper-level marketing and entrepreneurship courses now have students choosing to work with non-profit organizations approximately 25% of the time. The Faculties of Health, the School of Horticulture, and the Chip and Shannon Wilson School of Design also incorporate CSL into their courses.

**Social innovation and community partnerships** KPU’s strong record of partnerships with community organizations on social initiatives is reflected by the relationships it has established or is investigating with over 100 non-profit organizations, communities, and public sector offices. (A list of KPU’s identified community partners can be found in Appendix A). Selected key community projects, representing different forms of social innovation across disciplines, are highlighted below:

- **AT-CURA project** Acting Together is a strength-based project aimed at preventing youth gang involvement. This SSHRC-funded project is led by KPU’s Psychology Department in partnership with 12 community partners including the Surrey School District, the RCMP, and the City of Surrey amongst others. The project includes community-based research, training and education.
- **Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program** This program aims to bring university students and incarcerated men and women together to explore and learn about issues of crime and justice

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<sup>2</sup> Introduction, KPU calendar, 2013–2014

<sup>3</sup> K. O’Meara, L.R. Sandman, J. Saltmarsh, and D.E. Giles Jr. 2010. Studying the Professional Lives and Work of Faculty Involved in Community Engagement. *Innovations in Higher Education* 36:83–96

<sup>4</sup> In 2012, a number of B.C. colleges were re-designated as teaching-centered universities. KPU was the only polytechnic named, and our current strategic plan, Vision 2018, speaks directly to that designation.

<sup>5</sup> The absence of a deliberate rank and advancement system (akin to those at research-oriented universities) has supported our faculty members in this pursuit.

from behind prison walls. Supported by a grant from Telus, KPU's Criminology Department founded Canada's first program in 2011 where 13 students were selected to attend 14 weeks of classes inside a medium security federal institution with 13 inmates (who received credit, tuition-free, alongside the KPU students).

- **Surrey Poverty Reduction Plan 2012** KPU (through CIR:CLE) contributed to Surrey's first ever poverty reduction plan in partnership with the City of Surrey, Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC), the Fraser Health Authority Aboriginal Health, Surrey Homeless and Housing Task Force and Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society. Students from KPU's Anthropology Department have also been working with the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition to develop baseline markers of poverty in Surrey.
- **Aboriginal Gathering Place** 3.1% of 2013-14 KPU's student body is aboriginal; KPU proudly opened the doors to this space in 2010 with the goal of supporting the social and educational activities associated with attending the institution in an environment that recognizes the important contribution of the local Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, Tsawwassen, Katzie, and other Aboriginal Nations. Through this, in support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), in the fall of 2013, KPU hosted *Weaving Together: Healing, Education and Reconciliation*, a series of public events designed to continue the national dialogue on residential schools at a local level.
- **Richmond Farm School** This VanCity-funded training program aims to prepare people from all walks of life to engage in human-scale, urban-focused, sustainable agriculture enterprises. Over five years, KPU's Institute for Sustainable Food Systems has run the program in partnership with the Sharing Farm Society (which provides year-round produce for the Richmond Food Bank), the Richmond Food Security Society, Sweet Digz Farm (a for-profit enterprise) and the City of Richmond. Building on this, the **Tsawwassen First Nation Farm School** is a new collaboration that fuses sustainable agriculture and traditional indigenous food systems as tools to build community and create dialogue around land stewardship for the future. The program takes place on traditional Tsawwassen lands on a 20-acre farm that will soon boast a traditional medicine garden and food forest, orchards, organic market garden and incubator plots for the students that graduate from the program.
- **Southwest British Columbia Food System Design Project** KPU researchers from the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems are leading an initiative to engage communities in southwest BC in the development of a vision for a re-regionalized food system for 2050. The project involves 35 municipalities, community organizations, industry associations and others.
- **Health Tech Connex** KPU and the Faculty of Health are partnering with the City of Surrey, Fraser Health Authority, and Simon Fraser University to develop a health technology incubator facility along the corridor adjacent to the Surrey Memorial Hospital.
- **The Neighbormaker Project** Students KPU's Interior Design Program have recently partnered with the Museum of Vancouver on the topic of social disconnection. They have created social experiments and designed interventions that could help build trust between strangers in interior spaces.

**Programs and curricula** A particular strength of KPU has been the development of programs in response to community need. For example, our Faculty of Trades and Technology offers a Certificate in Advanced Farrier Training – the only one of its kind in BC. In May 2014, KPU announced that its Faculty of Health would be creating BC's first public School of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

At the level of encouraging social innovation, the newly-created Certificate in Non-Governmental Organizations and Nonprofit Studies is a joint offering of the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Business. It focuses on the local human rights, environmental, and advocacy organizations in B.C.'s Lower Mainland, and again is the only program of its kind in the region.

Concurrently, there is an increasing move towards social entrepreneurship as a component of programs offered at KPU, particularly within the School of Business. Within upper-level Business courses, there has been an increase in practicum placements that are aimed at facilitating the social entrepreneurial activities of NGOs. For example, the upper-level course ENTRE 4500 now has about 15% of its 35 students specifically working on developing new revenue streams for non-profit organizations. We have noted that there is a particular trend amongst our international students favouring such activities.

**Student-led initiatives** A recent community service learning course offered in the Faculty of Arts has led to the student-led initiative to develop the Student Volunteering, Community Learning and Integration Club (SVCLIC), a new club through the Kwantlen Student Association, specifically promoting volunteering and curriculum-based relationships that develop through community service learning.

**Centre for Interdisciplinary Research: Community Learning Engagement (CIR:CLE)** At the heart of KPU's community engagement. CIR:CLE was founded with the mandate of creating productive interdisciplinary partnerships between KPU faculty, students, staff and members of local organizations and other community groups. The centre creates meaningful opportunities for dialogue through research, speaker series, and other community events. CIR:CLE's mandate stems from the following four pillars of service: (1) working in the community (at the grassroots); (2) working for the community (by serving a purpose); (3) working in collaboration with the community; (4) and researching about the community, in an evaluative sense. CIR:CLE is well positioned to be a major driver of social innovation, engagement and impact at KPU.

### **VISION FOR GROWING SOCIAL INNOVATION AT KPU**

Attempts to further community engagement in higher education stem from a desire for public welfare or public good, and a real sense of wanting to address and respond to pressing social, environmental, political, and economic problems. This movement also strives to develop reciprocal partnerships, with a full and genuine engagement with various sectors of the public off campus. The true power of this direction in higher education is that it leads to the creation of new knowledge, social innovations, sustainable investment in community change, and a more comprehensive educational experience for our students.

We know that one of the key factors behind successful community service learning and knowledge mobilization initiatives is strong institutional support, particularly among senior administration. This creates a safe space for faculty innovation and experimentation. This culture is currently present at KPU.

Our most recent strategic plan, Vision 2018, speaks to the university's role in facilitating global citizenship and working towards the development of life-long engaged learners. An overarching goal, as laid out in Vision 2018, is that "the impact of KPU's community engagement has doubled by 2018." As detailed by this plan, KPU will "implement a coordinated approach to *document, expand, measure, and celebrate* effective partnerships with KPU's communities."<sup>6</sup> Vision 2018 discusses

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<sup>6</sup> Related goals are to establish KPU as "a key partner in regional economic development" and "a place where the community gathers for informed discussions on relevant topics", and to partner with Aboriginal communities to develop educational pathways and programs to facilitate Aboriginal learner success.

supporting and coordinating “opportunities for experiential learning, applied research, and community engagement.” Most importantly, it mandates that: “experiential learning is integrated into every KPU program, connecting theory to application and the classroom to the community.”

## **PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**

### **1) Expanding and deepening KPU’s community engagement**

#### **1.1. Building the capacity of CIR:CLE**

As outlined previously, KPU’s CIR:CLE is at the hub of the university’s activities in social innovation and community engagement. Our vision is to expand the capacity and centrality of CIR:CLE as an incubator and accelerator. It will coordinate and align the university’s planned expanded service learning program and interdisciplinary approaches to community engagement and knowledge mobilization – across institutional and sectorial boundaries. Additionally, it will:

- Incubate the development of new community-based research partnerships by participating in ‘community tables’ and other networking activities, holding community town hall meetings at KPU, and developing community research projects with community partners;
- Mobilize new pools of knowledge through a process of interactions, feedback and engagement;
- Research institutional systems that provide incentives and support for new organizational forms that are aligned with development needs;
- Offer knowledge mobilization and capacity building workshops for faculty, students, staff and community;
- Lead research and discussions about new quantitative and qualitative metrics for community engagement (see below); and
- Share information with other partners about best practices for community engagement and research mobilization.

#### **1.2 Mapping and expanding KPU’s service learning, social innovation partnerships, and social entrepreneurship**

Although a significant volume of activity is underway at KPU, it would be timely to conduct an internal mapping exercise so that the institution can develop a comprehensive understanding of the quantity and breadth of community engagement initiatives underway. In order to integrate service learning into all KPU programs and “double the impact” of our community engagement, we need to better understand and clarify our starting point. This exercise will be coordinated through CIR:CLE with research leadership undertaken by faculty members already deeply engaged with community service learning. Primary research will uncover KPU-specific successes and challenges from these experiences. Secondary research will support the development of recommendations for other KPU faculty who wish to incorporate service learning and community engagement into academic courses.<sup>7</sup> A digital visual media initiative (that we describe below) will be used to support and develop campus capacity in digital storytelling as part of this documentation process.

Once we have a core understanding of what has organically developed on the KPU campus in terms of service learning and community partnerships, we will endeavour to develop a specific focus on

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, leading national initiatives such as the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning (CACSL) and the SSHRC-supported Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE), co-managed by Carleton University and the Canadian Alliance for Community-Service, as well as the recent work of CUVic (see below). See also S. D. Cameron. 2010. *Getting wisdom: the transformative power of community service-learning*. The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, Montreal, Canada.

developing further partnerships that demonstrate social innovation in addressing complex challenges in our local community, as well as in developing social enterprise models directed to addressing such challenges. We can then integrate a corresponding focus on these elements into relevant course curricula across sectors. [enpBC](#) and the [B.C. Centre for Social Enterprise](#) are B.C. provincial resource hubs on social enterprise; a possible next step would involve inviting enpBC to the KPU campus to deliver their “Building your Social Enterprise” workshop to the campus/community. This could also be done in partnership with the Kwantlen Student Union. Similarly, [Innoweave](#)’s social enterprise module offers content that could be integrated into KPU course curricula. We would simultaneously encourage closer collaboration between our School of Business and other disciplinary entities on the KPU campus with an interest in social entrepreneurship.

### **1.3 Developing and contributing to community-based research networks**

The resources around campus-based engagement in the United States are very well developed and, in many cases, good models for crucial hubs of support.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, a range of initiatives are emerging to support the growth of community-based research across Canada. **[Community-Based Research Canada](#)** (CBRC) is now widely regarded as the lead network of people and organizations that promote community engagement in higher education in Canada. KPU is a member of **[ResearchImpact](#)** (RIR), a pan-Canadian “network of 10 universities that have invested in an institutional capacity to support knowledge mobilization among faculty, students and partner organizations,” offering “a suite of services that connects academic research and researchers with people and organizations seeking to develop sustainable solutions social, economic, environmental, cultural, and health challenges.” At the provincial level, **[BC Partners for Social Impact](#)** strives to make “measured improvements to our social and environmental challenges as a result of business, government and civil society partnerships.” Out of this, the University of Victoria and Simon Fraser University have been leading a dialogue to explore the potential of a BC Community-Based Research and Learning Network and have recently hosted the CUVic 2014: Beyond Engagement conference (May 2014), in which KPU participated. Through CIR:CLE, we will promote open collaboration and communication through participation in these and other networks.

**1.3 Student engagement** To provide opportunities for students to learn about and experiment with social innovation and entrepreneurship, we will work with the Kwantlen Student Union to bring in a series of relevant speakers, workshops and events. We will support the Student Volunteering, Community Learning and Integration Club (SVCLIC) with appropriately scaled resources. We will provide targeted opportunities for student engagement by employing a cross-sectorial group of students as research assistants on particular social innovation projects.

## **2) Documenting KPU’s community engagement**

### **2.1 Institution-wide visual media promotion**

Storytelling is crucial in facilitating the values of civil society. There are no tidy categories for the work and lives of scholars, students and institutions who are promoting the future of higher education, as it is tied to social innovation and social entrepreneurship. “We need studies, frameworks, and methods that weave together ... different sectors of faculty work.”<sup>9</sup> We need to be

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<sup>8</sup> [Campus Compact](#) is a national coalition of more than 1,100 colleges and universities dedicated to campus-based civic engagement, now reaching over 6 million students.

<sup>9</sup> K. O’Meara, L.R. Sandman, J. Saltmarsh, and D.E. Giles, Jr. 2011. Studying the professional lives and work of faculty involved in community engagement. *Innovative Higher Education* 36:83-96.

able to track personal triumphs, transformative experiences and multi-faceted attempts to mobilize knowledge.

The popularity and pervasiveness of online visual communication and culture is uncontested. Cutting-edge multimedia journalism, digital storytelling, and documentary skills allow people to be the writers, the producers, and the innovators of these digital visual messages. These are tools to support what RECODE refers to as creating “narratives of public possibility.”

We want to develop a digital visual media initiative<sup>10</sup> that provides training and capacity building for students, faculty, staff, community partners and the wider public. Aligned with the Department of Journalism and Communication<sup>11</sup>, this initiative will advocate real-life stories, real-world issues and solutions journalism aimed at highlighting solutions to complex social problems.

Alongside and supported by this initiative, we envision installing technologies that are highly visible and accessible to students in public spaces on all four of our campuses. This will provide a venue for developing, promoting and distributing a culture of digital storytelling.<sup>12</sup>

These tools and technologies will provide playful, explorative, innovative, and accessible opportunities for capturing social innovation, experiential learning, and community engagement. They can further be used to support course innovations, online video instruction, and other pilot projects that build the capacity to develop, reflect upon, and share stories, ideas, perspectives, and learnings in social innovation. They will be deployed across campus with the use of a campus-wide media campaign. Run in collaboration with the Kwantlen Student Union, an accompanying competition for the best production(s) will encourage and incentivize student involvement and uptake.

### 3) **Measuring academic community engagement**

In the spirit of redesigning higher education institutions from the inside out, there is a timely need for indicators to assess emergent qualities of academic endeavors. Such efforts have been underway over the past decade in many countries. Current indicators for academic success include bibliometric measures and other measures to track scholarly work. Yet, such measures fall short in addressing long-term impact, fail to address process-oriented work, fail to acknowledge work that is not credited by end-users, and typically lead to a lack of mobility and collaboration. There is growing awareness that indicators should be combined with more qualitative tools<sup>13</sup> and recent studies assert that we cannot rely on one or two indicators alone.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, there is a recognized need for markers that track community engagement in its fullest sense. There are fledging efforts underway to develop markers that have meaning to both higher

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<sup>10</sup> This has already been proposed on campus as the Digital Visual Media Workshop, receiving high levels of conceptual support amongst KPU’s administration.

<sup>11</sup> Possible consulting support could be provided by [Lumose](#), which incubated d.studio, Canada’s first strategic design studio.

<sup>12</sup> A first step will be to mount iPads across the campus. They can be installed with [Perch](#), an always-on real time video chat that can feature cross-campus, inter-community, inter-institution, and international connections. We will also examine other technologies such as that offered by the [Video Booth Company](#) which has set up the Speaker’s Corner for City TV in Vancouver and Toronto. With a high-definition camera, this booth offers the opportunity to capture high quality video that can convey the “real voice” of students, faculty, staff and the multifaceted nature of the university’s identity.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, D. Palomares-Montero and A. Garcia-Aracil. 2011. *Indicators for the evaluation of higher education institutions: a bibliographic review*. INGENIO (CSIC-UPV). Valencia, Spain.

<sup>14</sup> Ruscio et al. studied 22 different metrics.

education institutions and community partners.<sup>15</sup> CIR:CLE has taken first steps in operating as a “solutions lab” on this issue, with a recent co-presentation of a workshop entitled “Development of Impact Markers for Community Service Learning and Community Engagement” at the CUVic Conference at the University of Victoria.<sup>16</sup>

We plan to further a body of research that the leaders of community-based research and learning in Canada might apply towards understanding the growing body of work that considers the dynamics of collaboration and partnerships, while facilitating the values of civil society. In doing so, we intend to offer a solution as a capacity-building resource to higher education institutions in Canada struggling to understand how to enact a new model of university. We will contribute this to the RECODE National Network.

#### 4) Celebrating community engagement at KPU

All of the community engagement initiatives underway at KPU can be evocatively captured and disseminated in compelling ways that further develop both KPU’s self-image and its public face as an institution deeply rooted in its community. The use of media in such a public celebration will facilitate the development and impact of further community engagement initiatives. The ethical imperative of positive community impact can be developed as a core part of KPU’s brand and identity.

As we progress through our development, we envision a further celebratory step to take us out into the city and community in a new and visible way. This entails the creation of a Surrey-focused social innovation lab. We envision this based on the model of **CityStudio Vancouver**, “an innovation hub inside Vancouver City Hall where staff, university students and community members co-create, design and launch projects on the ground. The central mission of CityStudio is to innovate and experiment with the ways cities are co-created, while teaching students the skills needed to collaborate on real projects in Vancouver with municipal staff and community stakeholders.” We propose to work with the City of Surrey to explore opportunities, funding, and partnerships for developing a Surrey-based CityStudio, opening up a broad range of new opportunities for the community, our researchers, and our students.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, the Consortia Advancing Standards in Research Administration Information (CASRAI)’s efforts to develop common data standards in research impact.

<sup>16</sup> The findings from this workshop call for indicators that measure higher education institution experiences with examples of **fluidity** and/or shifts that had a positive impact on either community or students; failures at community engagement and the effort to **repair** the community/student/organization relationship; examples of meeting barriers and the ability to move through those barriers based on **knowledge** stemming from community engagement; and finally, **stories** that produce surprise, or a feeling of affect (note that storytelling is emerging in efforts to trace interrelated events over time to assess impacts of community engagement more broadly). Indicators in the social enterprise domain must also address a ‘blended value bottom line’ that is not financial or social, but rather financial and social. (See Jed Emerson, [www.blendedvalue.org](http://www.blendedvalue.org).)

<sup>17</sup> The development of this social innovation lab would be the perfect complement to KPU’s recent announcement that it will develop KPU Civic Plaza. Expected to open in early 2016, this expansion will deliver services to more than 1,600 students annual in Surrey’s downtown core. This new centre is envisioned to become a hub for community engagement, collaboration and connection.



## ENVISIONED CHANGES TO THE KPU TEACHING/RESEARCH/STUDENT EXPERIENCE

We are “in between the old paradigm and the new one”<sup>18</sup> and there is a restlessness among innovative educators and attentive students. Many students today aspire to make a difference in the world through their future professions, and are strongly motivated to gain hands-on experience that supports this. Such experiences can have a profound effect at the individual level.

Investing in social innovation at KPU would allow our faculty and students the opportunity to learn from the tremendous wealth of experience and knowledge resident in civil-society actors in Canada who are urging social change. Such an investment would enhance the skills and experience of members (both students and faculties) of the university; enhance KPU’s profile of the university in its locality as a good neighbour and responsible employer; increase recruitment and retention; and increase research and funding opportunities.

Moreover, it would spread the idea widely amongst our faculty and students that community engagement and social innovation is a moral imperative.<sup>19</sup> This will both change KPU in a positive direction and, with good stewardship and oversight, contribute to positive impacts in the surrounding community of Surrey, B.C. where the social stakes are high. Finally, it will contribute to changing the face of education in Canada by encouraging other universities to also focus on driving social change in response to society’s great challenges. This could meaningfully impact social progress for the decades to come.

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<sup>18</sup> S Bolduc, in S. D. Cameron. 2010. *Getting wisdom: the transformative power of community service-learning*. The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, Montreal, Canada.

<sup>19</sup> A. Russell et al. 2011. Sustaining community-university collaboration: the Durham University model. *Gateways; International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, 4:218.