

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.

## **McMaster University**

### **A Social Innovation Zone In Hamilton**

#### **Catalyzing Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Hamilton**

In the 1960s, McMaster University revolutionized the way that students are educated about how we engage with our community and society. This was done by converging educational discourse to focus on a multidisciplinary approach to addressing a specific problem, idea or opportunity. What would typically emerge as a solution would perhaps be initially unknowable, but the disruptive thinking that was inspired would result in novel, creative approaches and solutions. This began as a part of McMaster's medical education program, but eventually became a campus-wide phenomenon, and then a worldwide approach to post-secondary education.

The "problem-based learning" paradigm can be considered to be an early characterization of social innovation, and the identification of ways to leverage these ideas and create a sustainable enterprise is the foundation of entrepreneurship, and what is commonly considered social entrepreneurship.

McMaster University intends to build on a rich history of supporting entrepreneurial activity by enhancing opportunities for all of our students so that they can continue to expand the tenets of all aspects of entrepreneurship, including their roles as social innovators.

Our vision is to develop a **social innovation zone** that boosts student and youth experiential learning through engagement with entrepreneurial ventures both on campus and throughout the Hamilton area. McMaster University and the City of Hamilton are well-positioned for this development: We are the right place for student entrepreneurship and social innovation. Moreover, we are eager to support the national network fostered by the J.W. McConnell Foundation through the RECODE initiative.

We believe that through this process we will expand and embed impact into Hamilton's burgeoning youth-led startup community focused on building capacity, solving problems and leveraging opportunities. And this community will be built not just by contributions from McMaster students, faculty, staff and alumni. It will also be developed through collaboration with committed partners such as the Hamilton Community Foundation, Mohawk College, the City of Hamilton's Economic Development Office, the Innovation Factory, the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce and the McMaster Innovation Park. Together, we are committed to enhancing an entrepreneurial ecosystem built by Hamilton youth for the good of Hamilton and beyond.

#### **McMaster's Vision for Enhancing Student Entrepreneurship**

McMaster President Patrick Deane has identified community engagement and student experiential learning as pillars of his vision for the University, as stated in his letter, *Forward with Integrity*. Within this spirit, McMaster has a strong interest in fostering and nurturing entrepreneurship and innovation in the Hamilton community. We are proud to have the opportunity to invest in such an infrastructure that empowers students to create, build, and cultivate a stronger and socially responsive community, and enables all young citizens to collaborate with accessible resources. This focus is supported by our commitment to multidisciplinary approaches and cross-faculty collaboration. Consistently ranked as a top 100 university in the world, McMaster is dedicated to fostering a culture of collaboration.

McMaster has committed to making entrepreneurship in all of its many facets a core component of the educational experience for any student who seeks this option. One distinguishing feature is the co-curricular nature of the McMaster approach. We are dedicated to tapping into the passions and interests of our students, who are pursuing this route because they want to, not just to earn a course credit.

This approach means we can be flexible and nimble in our efforts, and less constrained in the way that formal curriculum development can be, while at the same time we plan to build on the foundation of our already existing curricular efforts. This plan will capitalize on the McMaster community's expertise and orientation to enhance experiential activities for our students and make a positive impact on society. Ultimately, this passion translates into greater success.

### **Hamilton: A Hub for High –Impact Entrepreneurs in a Resilient City**

Our Hamilton community has seen a generation-wide emergence of entrepreneurship, often with a specific focus on activities that address the greater good. These endeavours can range from a McMaster alumnus creating a business centred on recycling the Toronto Zoo's annual manure output and grocery store food waste into electricity, heat and fertilizer to restaurants specializing in fair trade and sustainable products. The leaders of this movement consist of members of the Hamilton community, students or alumni of McMaster University and other city educational institutions, and young residents looking to make a difference and contribute to the place they call home and beyond.

Indeed, since 2010 McMaster has helped foster the generation of almost 120 student-led startup companies, many of these getting their start at the McMaster Innovation Park. In fact, during the last two years more than 400 youth have been exposed to entrepreneurship, 96 of which were in startup companies with 18 youth-led startup companies incubated at the McMaster Innovation Park. Through this, 105 jobs were created. Eighteen companies benefited, generating revenues or raising more than \$1 million collectively and including funding from grants and friendly investors.

Hamilton provides an ideal backdrop for these pursuits. After decades of significant economic decline following the retreat of the manufacturing sector, there is a strong appetite for new innovative products, businesses, and industries to redefine and rebuild the economy. Property prices are a fraction of the level in Toronto, enabling young entrepreneurs to invest and lease space in Hamilton's downtown core or east-end, where much of the manufacturing sector once existed. Former students and young, entrepreneurial residents alike prefer to live in Hamilton, build products and businesses, and help create jobs and invest in the local communities.

### **Entrepreneurism at McMaster**

For years, entrepreneurship education has been part of the McMaster mindset and with each new cohort of students, it continues to grow and evolve. It is embedded within all six McMaster faculties: the humanities and social sciences, in our health sciences faculty, and within engineering, science and our DeGroote School of Business. Enhancing existing entrepreneurial activities benefits students with ideas and opportunities in all fields of study – whether they are enrolled as undergraduate or graduate students, or whether they are in a full-time program or enrolled part-time.

Students enrolled in the Walter G. Booth School of Engineering Practice that includes the Xerox Centre for Engineering Entrepreneurship and Innovation have focused on creating new products from forefront disruptive technology, while DeGroote School of Business students participate in entrepreneurship classes as part of their course of study. Groups such as the McMaster Entrepreneurship Association, the McMaster Entrepreneurship Student Showcase and the McMaster Social Innovation Lab offer students from all disciplines valuable

opportunities to present their ideas and inventions for feedback and inspiration. We believe there is a great opportunity to embed impact into our focus on entrepreneurship.

### **A Track Record of Success for Our Committed Partners**

Entrepreneurship also extends well beyond the lecture hall. Experimental incubation spaces available at McMaster Innovation Park, such as preINC and the Don Pether Incubation Centre, and partnerships with our linked community organizations provide expertise and connections to leaders who have embraced the entrepreneurial culture.

From Tal Dehtiar, founder of fair trade footwear company, Oliberté, to Stephanie McLarty of REfficient, an online reuse marketplace for new, refurbished and used telecom equipment, several successful McMaster alumni are part of the contingent of expert advisors with relevant experience and a willingness to share what they've learned. These engaged alumni – entrepreneurs in social innovation, technology and product development as well as venture capital and social capital investors, community leaders and municipal government staff – and other interested residents are eager to work with students and like-minded citizens to further foster a culture of entrepreneurship and resiliency.

We anticipate that new student entrepreneurship activities will boost the creation of startups that are also strategic to McMaster's research strengths: a life sciences focus due to established relationships and proximity to the city's hospitals and the health sciences faculty, advanced manufacturing/automotive expertise aligned with a cluster of companies, as well as CanMET and the McMaster Automotive Resource Centre, and work in the area of biomaterials with links to McMaster's Biointerfaces Institute and the Brockhouse Institute for Materials Research.

In addition, Hamilton's vibrant arts and culture sector is destined to produce social innovations propelled by our students and youth. The Hamilton Community Foundation's *Vital Signs* report notes that the number of artists in Hamilton has grown 22 per cent over the last 15 years, faster than the overall labour force. Student entrepreneurs linking with a successful arts community undoubtedly promote economic development and enrich overall quality of life.

### **Our Social Innovation Zone**

McMaster's overall strategy to support student entrepreneurship and social innovation involves three key components:

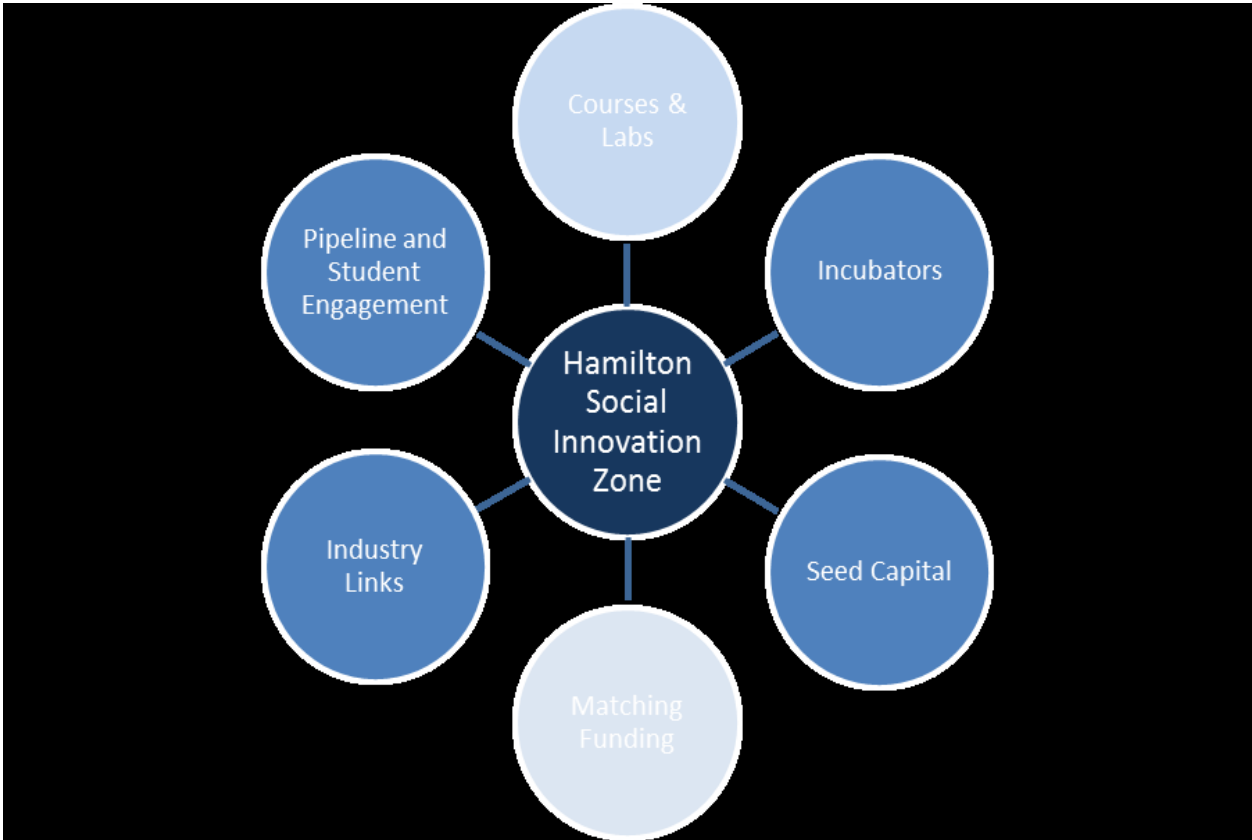
- 1. Education and Community Outreach:** This fall, McMaster is issuing a student call to action through the **RISE** initiative, spearheaded by Dean of Students Sean Van Koughnett. **RISE**'s main role is to inspire students, giving them the foundational support they need to evolve their ideas and projects into viable, sustainable ventures. The support will include weekly programming such as workshops, a speaker series and social entrepreneur and pitch competitions as well as high-level and peer-to-peer mentorship. McMaster graduate Justin Policarpio, our new manager of student entrepreneurship, will oversee these activities. This approach will encourage students to self-identify as entrepreneurs and help build new enterprises. It will foster collaboration and competition while giving youth a platform to take risks and engage with mentors and community advisors in a meaningful way.
- 2. Accelerator space:** McMaster is leading the creation of a community-based campus-linked accelerator. This space will be a vibrant environment, located minutes from campus at the McMaster Innovation Park. It will support students, researchers, faculty and community members with activities that may include prototyping and product development to the convergence of socially innovative ideas. A second site is slated to be developed in

downtown Hamilton, giving our students varying locations to work and interact with like-minded colleagues and community partners. Creating supportive space is fundamentally important to our students' success.

**3. Seed funding:** Seed funding will be used to jump-start five nascent social enterprises designed, built and led by student entrepreneurs. This builds stronger links to community partners, mentors, and alumni willing to help.

**The Hamilton Social Innovation Zone**

These three components will help us to build a high-impact social innovation zone, starting in four of the six areas identified by the RECODE program.



**McMaster's Long-Term Commitment to Success**

Our work will not only be limited to the three priority activities. McMaster will make further investments and commitments to the development of the social innovation zone by building spaces and resources on campus, eventually including a student residence community, and in the community, by establishing space for entrepreneurs in downtown Hamilton. Integrating startup spaces, mentorship and programming into on-campus living and off-campus areas such as the McMaster Innovation Park and downtown work environments is an essential, tangible way of fostering an entrepreneurial mindset within our students and throughout the community, connecting them with mentors and their clients.

We also anticipate embedding social entrepreneurship in co-curricular and course offerings for students across faculties through tailored curriculum, guest speakers, labs, workshops and events. A pipeline for investment will be built by hosting local pitch events for impact entrepreneurs and engaging alumni as prospective investors.

Notably, this focus on fostering student entrepreneurship and social innovation will become an essential component of the value proposition for incoming McMaster students.

Clearly, this strategic focus on entrepreneurship manifests itself in several different opportunities, and in several different environments. Yet the components of this strategy are inextricably linked. We are committed to enabling Hamilton youth, numbering almost 75,000, to gain invaluable education and experience as young entrepreneurs, while providing a resource and an opportunity to provide two-way, proactive engagement with entrepreneurial and supportive members of the broad Hamilton community.