

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.

Niagara College Canada

Niagara College Canada educates and trains workers for in-demand roles in today's job market, helping increase employment, improve the economy and raise the standard of living for thousands of people every year. We provide close-to-home education directly linked to the labour market, providing our youth with the advanced skills they need for an ever-changing workplace. Each year, almost 5,000 Niagara College students gain real-world experience through paid co-op positions with business, culinary, hospitality, environment and technology companies. Three quarters of our 70,000 alumni live in the Niagara region, contributing to every major economic sector. College graduates are the backbone of many occupations, skills and trades that are crucial to a strong economy.

A major strength of our college has always been its ability to quickly adapt to the changing needs of Niagara communities. As the regional economy continues to transition from an economy based on manufacturing to one based on services such as digital media, health and wellness, and the green sector, Niagara remains relatively disadvantaged because of a job mix that emphasizes lower-paying jobs than in other areas of the province.

Engaging youth in meaningful employment opportunities is critical if the Niagara region is to overcome its persistent challenge of attracting and retaining a skilled young workforce. This Student Leadership initiative supports Niagara College's strategic mandate to provide a high quality, research and innovation rich educational environment directly linked to regional economy and community that enables its graduates to work effectively in a globally connected, rapidly changing world.

Niagara College already exhibits a strong culture of Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship through Niagara Research, Community Outreach, and Learning Enterprises.

Our Niagara Research division brings together teams of faculty, students and industry partners to develop innovative solutions through applied research for real-world problems. It has become a national model helping companies to grow and create jobs to revitalize the Niagara economy.

Community outreach by our faculty, staff and students includes thousands of hours of hands-on learning through student driven initiatives such as:

- Many Hands Project, now in its 17th year, through which students in the Event Management and Construction Studies programs fundraise and complete a renovation project for a non-profit organization.
- Shiny Smiles for All Clinic, now in its 7th year, through which Niagara College's Dental students provide clinics designed to help children who may not otherwise have access to dental care.
- Second Wind Dreams, now in its third year, through which Recreation Leisure students raise money, and Recreation Therapy students work with the Niagara Health System to

make dreams come true for senior residents of the Welland Hospital's Extended Care Unit.

Niagara College is also a leader in the development of successful Learning Enterprises. Students in our Culinary, Dental, Horticulture and Agribusiness, Spa and Salon and Winery, Viticulture and Brewery programs have the opportunity to study and work in the Learning Enterprises as a core part of their program. They work at a functioning restaurant, dental clinic, winery, brewery, greenhouse, spa and hair salon, providing the services and products of their chosen industry to the public. Proceeds of all sales support student learning.

The development of a Social Innovation Zone aligns with Niagara College's vision: Enriching Lives and Fulfilling Dreams, and its mission: Providing outstanding applied learning for a changing world. It also builds on our institution's strengths, and supports the three key priorities that form the basis of Niagara College's 2013-16 strategic plan: providing unparalleled student experience and satisfaction; leading in innovation and research; and achieving operational excellence.

What are your initial aspirations and vision for how social innovation can take root and grow at your institution, and contribute to broader change?

Our aspiration is that the development of a partial Social Innovation Zone will create a strong culture of Social Innovation and produce student leaders who are social innovators. Our vision is to empower students to be leaders in creating systemic change in the Niagara Region by increasing student understanding of the Niagara context and providing experiential learning opportunities for student-led Social Innovation through Niagara College's student leadership program. Through the student leadership program, this initiative will allow students to:

- Connect with individuals and community groups to increase information sharing and facilitate collaboration toward addressing community issues;
- Gain practical experience by giving students a chance to try their hand at developing a Social Innovation; and
- Share experiences and learning through opportunities for reflection.

What are your initial aspirations and vision for how social entrepreneurship can take root and grow at your institution, and contribute to broader change?

Social Entrepreneurship is taking root within the Niagara Region, and is attracting increasing interest from funders, government, and non-profit organizations as a means of addressing persistent local challenges. Community partners have expressed an interest in engaging postsecondary students to take leadership in innovating solutions to the challenges they are tackling.

Our aspiration is to catalyze student leadership in utilizing business models and practices to tackle job creation in Niagara, and other social issues and environmental challenges. Our vision is to produce graduates who can meet the local need for social entrepreneurship. To do this we will develop the interconnectivity of the student leadership program and the schools within the Business, Hospitality, and Environmental Division: Business & Management Studies; Hospitality, Tourism, & Administrative Studies; and Environmental and Horticultural Studies. Through this collaboration the initiative will allow students to:

- Connect with individuals and community groups looking to utilize Social Entrepreneurship to address community issues;
- Gain practical experience by trying their hand at developing a Social Enterprise;
- Access a team of applied researchers to assist in developing their social business plan; and
- Share learning through opportunities to reflect and disseminate research.

What types of activities, practices, programs and/or structures are you proposing to achieve this?

The development of a Social Innovation zone will improve experiential learning opportunities by incorporating innovative ideas, systems and processes within the institution and the local non-profit sector. The initiative increases synergies between the College’s recently piloted leadership program, student clubs, and three academic schools within the Business, Hospitality, and Environmental Division: Business & Management Studies; Hospitality, Tourism, & Administrative Studies; and Environmental and Horticultural Studies.

It will build on existing activities, practices and programs to integrate them into a partial Social Innovation Zone at the campus level. Our plan is to develop synergies among complementary activities, practices and programs within the Centre for Student Engagement and Leadership, student clubs, and three schools to support the growth of four key elements of a Social Innovation Zone: A Pipeline for Student Engagement, Industry Links, Courses and Labs, and Matching Funds, to enhance existing community service learning programs to include a specific focus on Social Innovation or Social Enterprise.

Pipeline for Student Engagement

This initiative will integrate opportunities for students to enhance their understanding of Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship through co-curricular experiences including:

- Hosting guest speakers on Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship in the Leadership Development Program’s Speakers Series;
- Expanding available co-curricular experiences by providing opportunities for students to attend conferences and events, and enter competitions related to Social Innovation and Social Enterprise;
- Hosting Leadership Days of Action to inspire students to lead change in their communities;
- Providing opportunities for students to reflect and share their learnings of Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship; and
- Providing students, who have shown leadership in addressing local issues using Social Innovations, the opportunity to act as a community partner for a team of faculty and student Social Innovation and Social Enterprise researchers.

Industry Links

Several community partners anticipate collaborating with Niagara College on this initiative. This initiative includes activities that facilitate student access to key community partners, such as Niagara Connects, the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network, the Niagara Sustainability Initiative, and Niagara Region Community Services, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities.

Niagara Connects

Niagara Connects is a Niagara-wide network of people for collaboration, planning, learning, innovation and community action toward a stronger future for Niagara. Its mission is: Generating Knowledge that Drives Community Action. The network takes an assets-based approach to

describing quality of life in Niagara, and produces relevant, reliable knowledge products for strengthened planning in Living in Niagara Sectors, including: learning and education, economic development, health and wellness, and the environment. The network gather diverse Niagara partners in a trusted social space, to work together on emerging issues of Niagara-wide importance. Niagara Connects is committed to support this initiative by:

- Engaging Niagara College students and staff in leveraging the niagaraknowledgeexchange.com (NKE) tool (built, in part, with Platformation funding support) to access relevant, reliable information to strengthen research and planning in the Niagara context;
- Helping to spark ideas among Niagara College students and staff about ways to engage in enacting the Niagara-wide community's Suggested Action Steps from the Living in Niagara-2014 report;
- Sharing information with people working in the 12 Living in Niagara Sectors, about Social Innovation and Social Enterprise leadership being taken by Niagara College students; and
- Suggesting connections for initiatives led by postsecondary students within and across all 12 Living in Niagara Sectors.

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network

The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network is a group of more than 35 social agencies, educators, business and government representatives, faith communities and individuals, working collectively within the Niagara Region to achieve their vision: All Niagara residents live above the poverty line. The Network is committed to support this initiative by:

- Providing presentations of the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network's Speakers Bureau to Niagara College students and staff in order to further develop their understanding of local poverty issues and to debunk myths about poverty in Niagara;
- Sharing information with Niagara College students and staff about the local issues which have been prioritized by the Network and its members, and about the initiatives of the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network working groups, including: community developers, garden network, housing, micro-credit and transportation; and
- Suggesting social sector connections and/or partnerships for Social Innovation or Social Enterprise initiatives led by postsecondary students.

Niagara Region, Community Services, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities (SAEO)

SAEO provides financial assistance and a range of employment supports and activities, in partnership with community agencies, to enable participants and their families to achieve independence through sustainable employment. SAEO has partnered with Niagara College to develop and deliver short-term targeted training to prepare job seekers to successfully transition to the labour force. Niagara College has effectively delivered the Self Employment Development Program for SAEO for more than 10 years. SAEO is committed to support this initiative by:

- Providing presentations to Niagara College students and staff in order to further develop their understanding of societal challenges in Niagara; and
- Suggesting social sector connections and/or partnerships for initiatives led by postsecondary students.

Niagara Sustainability Initiative (NSI)

NSI is a not-for-profit organization with a focus on improving environmental and economic performance through the greening of local businesses and municipalities. It is NSI's goal to provide the opportunity for local organizations to capitalize on a changing consumer landscape, one which demands environmental responsibility; and by doing so help the public and private sectors of the Niagara Region contribute to an environmentally and economically thriving community. Working with 17 partner organizations, NSI recognizes that addressing sustainability and the environment is a complex problem with interlocking causes and effects, requiring an innovative and collaborative approach. NSI is committed to support this initiative by:

- Sharing information with Niagara College about the local environmental sustainability issues which have been prioritized by key stakeholders, and about initiatives within the Niagara Region;
- Providing access to NSI's newest initiative, Crowdsourcing Sustainability, an online database for everything relating to environmental sustainability in Niagara, so that they are able to access and post information that Niagara's community needs to live a more sustainable lifestyle and celebrate local sustainability efforts; and
- Suggesting environmental sector connections and/or partnerships for initiatives led by postsecondary students.

Courses and Labs

This initiative will provide links between the Student Leadership Development Program, and the Community Engagement and Volunteering service provided by the Centre for Student Engagement and Leadership, and relevant courses within the Business, Hospitality, and Environmental Division to enhance theory and training for students. It will support student development by providing opportunities for students to further develop the skills learned in the classroom by exploring and trying their hand at Social Innovation and Social Enterprise through co-curricular experiences. Activities will include:

- A theory and training session for faculty and staff who are interested in engaging students in Social Innovation initiatives;
- Applied Research through the Schools to support student-led Social Enterprise initiatives, building on Niagara Research's proven model for engaging faculty and students in research. Additional funding would open opportunities for faculty to engage students in applied research to lay a foundation for student led social enterprises;
- Purchase of Learning Resources to assist students engaging in Social Innovation or Social Entrepreneurship.

How do they align with existing initiatives on campus?

The new initiatives align with the following existing co-curricular and curricular initiatives on campus.

Centre for Student Engagement & Leadership

The Centre for Student Engagement and Leadership is dedicated to helping provide a well-rounded experience - including on-campus events, volunteerism opportunities and more - for all students, from first year to graduation. Introduced in the Fall of 2012, the Centre has been embraced by employers and the Niagara College community. With a focus on innovating for unparalleled student experience, the Centre has seen significant growth in its first two years. The Centre provides services to support student engagement and leadership including:

GetInvolved Portal

The GetInvolved Portal is a centralized online portal that supports student involvement in co-curricular experiences. Students will access information about Social Innovation and Social Enterprise related activities, including the Guest Speaker events, opportunities to attend conferences, and reflection through the GetInvolved portal. Students will also use the GetInvolved Portal to track their experiences on their Co-Curricular Record.

Co-Curricular Record

Co-Curricular Record (CCR) is an official Niagara College document developed to enhance student resume, and career or academic portfolios. By registering for the program, individuals gain recognition for student engagement, leadership and co-curricular activities pursued outside of the classroom. This service supports student credentials when applying for jobs, internships, scholarships, awards, continuing education and further development experiences. The Co-curricular Record will be used by students to track all co-curricular engagement and leadership experiences pertaining to Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship.

Student Leadership Development Program

Niagara College's Student Leadership Development Program is a co-curricular program designed to offer students from any academic area the opportunity to explore and develop leadership skills in three key themes: individual growth, group development and community values. Through learning, growth and experience in these areas, students challenge themselves, bring out their personal best and develop the skills to affect change and make an impact. The program develops students' leadership skills while enhancing the career-focused, hands-on training they get in their program of study.

Students earn a Foundations in Leadership Certificate through the program workshops and Speaker Series. They may go one step further and earn a Distinction in Leadership Certificate by participating in on- and off-campus leadership experiences. This program is a great way for students to gain a competitive edge, valuable leadership skills and experience, and develop their resume and portfolio. The Guest Speakers on Social Innovation and Social Enterprise will be offered as part of the Leadership Program Speaker Series. The opportunity to attend workshops and conferences on Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship will be provided to students in the Student Leadership Development Program.

Community Engagement & Volunteering

Community Engagement & Volunteering is a co-curricular service designed to encourage and facilitate the engagement of students in addressing important issues within the Niagara Region. Students can engage in volunteer opportunities with a variety of community partners, including not-for-profits, community groups and small businesses. Community Engagement and Volunteering will facilitate the community links involved in the initiative. The Community Engagement Co-ordinator will share a competency or capacity-building resource with the RECODE National Network, which will be shared locally through the Niagara Knowledge Exchange.

Niagara College Student Administrative Council (NCSAC)

NCSAS aspires to provide healthy and safe activities, facilities, and services while promoting an accessible college environment and contributing to the quality of student life. One of the most active student clubs supported by NSAC is Enactus, through which students apply business concepts learned in the classroom to develop and implement community outreach projects to improve the quality of life and standards of living for people in need in our local and global communities. In the 2013-14 academic year, Enactus reached its maximum capacity, with more

than 80 members on its GetInvolved organization page. This initiative will assist NCSAC to expand the capacity for student engagement and leadership in the area of Social Innovation and Social Enterprise as student interest continues to grow. NCSAC will explore ways to provide greater support to students who are considering starting a club to create community impact as it redevelops its NCSAC Club Kit.

Business, Hospitality, and Environmental Division – Niagara on the Lake Campus

This academic division offers courses within the School of Business & Management Studies and the School of Hospitality, Tourism, & Administrative studies, which provide opportunities for students to complement their coursework with co-curricular opportunities through which they could explore and develop a Social Innovation or Social Enterprise Initiative. From January to April 2014 a “Social Enterprise Circle” initiative was piloted, in which a group of eight students in the Hospitality and Tourism program working on a course-based business development project, were able to collaborate with a student from the Environmental Management and Assessment program to explore the creation of an on-campus Social Enterprise initiative to address student transportation challenges. This pilot project adopted curriculum from The Case for Social Entrepreneurship and Changemaking Education, Ashoka University. In April 2014 the resulting report was presented to Niagara College’s Sustainability Committee; the outcome of this process is the forthcoming implementation of a carpool program at Niagara College in September 2014. The creation of a Social Innovation Zone will expand upon the model piloted through the Social Innovation Circle by providing resources for a staff theory and training session, and funding for faculty members to support similar course-based research projects.

If funded, how might this change the teaching, research and/or student experience on your campus?

If funded this initiative would assist in further developing a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship for Niagara College students by increasing:

- On-campus awareness of Social Innovation and Social Enterprise;
- Opportunities for student engagement and leadership in addressing local issues through Social Innovation or Social Enterprise;
- Greater exposure and practical experience in Social Innovation and Social Enterprise;
- Sharing of Social Innovation research and stories; and
- Celebration of successful student-led Social Innovations.

This initiative would change the teaching experience by increasing opportunities for course-based research projects related to Social Innovation and Social Enterprise, the on-campus sharing of teaching practices among faculty interested in engaging students in Social Innovations and Enterprises, and enhancing collaboration and information exchanges between faculty and community partners within the Niagara Region.