

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.

OCAD University

As Canada's "university of the imagination", OCAD University is uniquely situated to serve as a model for the integration of social innovation throughout the learning experience, specifically at the RECODE campus level. With a history stretching back to 1876, OCAD University is engaged in transformative undergraduate and graduate education, scholarship, research and innovation. OCAD University makes vital contributions to the fields of art, design, and digital media through local and global cultural initiatives. The University supports a high-quality, diverse research practice across a wide range of disciplines, creating partnerships in bold, future-facing collaborations.

Three OCAD U departments, central to the delivery of entrepreneurial and commercial initiatives here at OCAD University, have come together to prepare this proposal for a Social Innovation Zone:

1. The **Digital Media Research + Innovation Institute** (DMRII), is the existing applied and academic interdisciplinary integration of all research labs and innovation at OCAD U. The DMRII's research lab portfolio includes a wide scope of applied research ranging from strategic foresight to commercialization. The Strategic Innovation Lab (sLAB) integrates academic research, professional engagements, educational modules and skills development programs for stakeholders in the for-profit, not-for-profit and government sectors. Its research portfolio focuses on the intersections of design thinking, business and foresight (or futures thinking) with a growing community of academics, practitioners, alumni, students and business leaders. The Informal Economy Research Hub is a research team that studies innovation and inclusivity, resource constraints and need, and creativity/entrepreneurship in marginalized communities.
2. Since 2010, The **Imagination Catalyst** (IC) is the university's hub for entrepreneurship and commercialization initiatives. Its mission is to support and develop entrepreneurial talent, to help launch new creative companies, and/or commercialize products and services that ultimately contribute to Canada's economic prosperity.
3. The **Centre for Emerging Artists & Designers** (CEAD) serves as the bridge between formal education and economic self-sufficiency for students, providing a range of opportunities for students to apply their skills and talents in a variety of community-based and industry settings. The CEAD houses both the Institute for Emerging Artists & Designers – providing co-curricular financial literacy, leadership and arts management training to students nearing graduation – and the Experiential Learning Program which facilitates placements for service-learning courses.

Aspirations and Vision for Social Innovation

OCAD University is a cultural force in Canada, and as such takes on the added responsibility of preparing its students to become productive drivers in creative industries. The university is poised to significantly expand its system for supporting faculty and alumni to be cultural leaders, practitioners, creative thinkers, strategists, inventors, and innovators – people who have the skills to make calculated risks and strong contributions to the cultural, social, and economic

prosperity of Canada, and the world at large. The current vision of social innovation can be found in the OCAD U Strategic Plan:

“As a specialized university, OCAD U brings valuable creative-thinking capacities nurtured by art and design to address problems and challenges faced by society.”

This commitment is demonstrated throughout the University, strongly committed to nurturing individual talent while enabling unprecedented collaboration between all undergraduate and graduate programs. For example, the university’s undergraduate program in Art and Social Change sees itself as an engine that engages students in the “art that creates change” movement, delivering a curriculum focused on social innovation and its extra-curricular programs. In the Faculty of Design, undergraduate programs are built on the platform of “design for humanity” and encourage students to “think critically and responsively, to consider human and environmental needs.” The Master of Design in Strategic Foresight and Innovation develops hubs of social design in its social design curriculum.

Through the development of an intentional Social Innovation Zone, OCAD University will leverage these commitments to both scale-up initiatives in experiential learning, strengthen and deepen external partnerships, and expand opportunities for co-curricular engagement as well as community and industry- based research.

Aspirations and Vision for Social Entrepreneurship

OCAD University’s DMRII, the Imagination Catalyst, and the CEAD foster a collaborative entrepreneurial culture across the university campus, in an effort to unite, mobilize, and focus the power of our cultural industries, with all of its scholarship and creativity. This process focuses entrepreneurship to address the most pressing social and environmental issues of our time. We have made great strides in creating sustainable connections with external corporate, not for profit, NGOs and government sectors already, but we are now ready to scale-up the benefits for social entrepreneurs.

Our vision is to mobilize and focus new energy to put in place the opportunities, tools, resources and mentorship to bring the best ideas to the forefront and to ensure that social entrepreneurs with considerable potential have the opportunity to thrive.

Project Proposal: Activities, Practices and Programs

Incubator/accelerator on Campus: The Imagination Catalyst

The Imagination Catalyst currently has 22 start-up enterprises targeted at verticals like health and wellness, entertainment, greening our cities, fitness coaching, and custom manufacturing. Products launched into the market place or those under development range from a light-weight electric bicycle, an innovative and creative toy that encourages empathy, a network for disabled entrepreneurs in the developing world, an open-source toolkit for intelligent web/mobile interfaces, a company transforming construction sites into ongoing art exhibitions, to wearable technology for bike safety. Start-Ups selected in the IC’s annual “Take it to Market” competition benefit from cohort-based support and programming, which includes management

training, funding support, work space, access to experts, fabrication facilities, mentor network and support from MaRS (OCAD University's Regional Innovation Centre or RIC).

In April 2014, the IC and Toronto's Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) signed a formal partnership agreement to nurture creative social enterprises on campus. The IC is creating a social innovation and social enterprise stream within its program for the benefit of three competitively selected companies/teams for on-campus residencies and the CSI has extended its membership for 20 IC participants within its three CSI communities in Toronto and access to its Ontario Catapult micro-loan to enable the growth of world-changing art and design social enterprises. RECODE Catalyst Fund is envisioned to allow the extension of this collaboration.

Seed funds for New Ventures

Survey research conducted at OCAD University has revealed that over 80% of art and design students will spend at least part of their career as self-employed professionals⁶. At the same time, there is increasing concern in Toronto with the growing prevalence of precarious employment – work that lacks the social benefits and legal protections of full-time employment, and brings with it risks and insecurity⁷. For this goal the CEAD envisions two new social innovation programs: Arts Trader and the Design Advantage Hub that could be made possible with the RECODE Catalyst Fund. This would enable to complete participatory research on what the programs need to become and launch them in a pilot phase until they can become financially self-sustaining and generate seed funds for new ventures.

Design Advantage Hub: OCAD U has recently completed a preliminary research project⁸ into the best practices and support required to build a Design Advantage Hub program for design students and graduates. The research, funded through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, examined the specific and most critical needs of graduates entering the labour market, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds, newcomers, women and members of marginalized and/or visual-minority communities. Complementary to this review, a market study also explored the possibilities of student-driven business operations that fulfilled the needs of social enterprises, including not-for-profit and/or governmental agencies within the Greater Toronto Area. The hub could consist of emerging freelance professionals – industrial and environmental designers, photographers, illustrators, web and interaction designers, for example – working collaboratively in a semi-supervised environment to serve the needs of the not-for-profit sector while learning the business side of self-employment.

Arts Trader Program: This proposed social enterprise initiative, will match the skills of an emerging artist with a partner in the broader cultural sector—e.g. a community group, an established artist, performing arts group, or a library—that requires their services for a short-term contract. The emerging artist gains an income-earning opportunity, as well as the practical skills, tools and experience. The community group connects with a new talent and builds new connections within the artistic community. And the relationship helps to strengthen important income-generating bonds between Toronto's various creative communities. The Arts Trader Program could systematically prepare emerging visual artists for their transition to specialized freelance practitioner. This project seeks to achieve the following goals:

1. Addressing issues of vulnerable and precarious employment among young people—forging connections that build stronger social and employment networks
2. Creating non-linear paths of income generation for artists

3. Giving emerging artists necessary business skills such as contract negotiation, budgeting, project management and relationship-building
4. Supporting cultural and community organizations, the literary and performing arts and fellow visual artists to build communities of practice that generate economic returns
5. Minimizing the impact of likely reductions in arts funding by training practitioners to create their own sustainable economic opportunities in Toronto

Liaison with corporate, community and public sector organizations

OCAD University has a strong track record and thorough plans to continue to expand its relationships with corporate, community, and public sector organizations. From annual participation in the City's Nuit Blanche festival to the daily interactions between business and NGOs in our classroom and lab environments, the University acts as a creative city-builder.

In addition to our partnership with CSI, and Artscape Launchpad, OCAD University would build collaboration agreements with the School for Social Enterprise Ontario, the Social Venture Partners, and a research collaboration with the Desis Network (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability).

The School for Social Entrepreneurs Ontario, established in 2012, is a Global Institute that has mentorship programs for social entrepreneurs and conducts impact research on social ventures. The Imagination Catalyst can extend Incubator/Accelerator facilities to SSEO social entrepreneurs. Social Venture Partners is a network of engaged philanthropists who invest in social enterprises. The Imagination Catalyst is developing a formal partnership with SVP to create a social venture pitch competition.

DMR II is developing the research collaboration with Desis, with the benefit of having Professor Ezio Manzini as the mentor for the OCAD U Social Innovation hub, representing a global pluralistic voice on social innovation.

Engaging student groups

While many academic institutions are focused on understanding the transition from graduation into the cultural economy through efforts that are based largely in traditional career development models, the Centre for Emerging Artists & Designers is committed to the living laboratory model – providing opportunities for students to take risks and actively experiment in settings that help them gain the experiences they need for longer term success. The Centre is supported through a combination of internal reallocation of resources and external financial support from Royal Bank of Canada Foundation. Programs and services currently offered by the Centre include workshops, panel discussions, networking events, mentorship opportunities, placements, and portfolio development opportunities and a Financial Literacy program (developed by students, for students) that builds skills in practical money management that encourage income stability and self-sufficiency. RECODE Catalyst support, combined with success in a pending application from another foundation, will enable us to structure a specific fund to encourage student-generated proposals for social venture projects.

Links to relevant course and lab work

The DMR II sLAB's **Social Ecosystem Design Group** is a research group that employs systemic design tools to develop designs of social systems alongside sustainable business models.

The Structured Dialogic Design (SDD) technique is a strategic design and planning workshop methodology that produces a strong consensus to avoid biases and personal power agendas by using language tags that conserve participant autonomy, authenticity, and builds on shared commitment. SDD is facilitated over one or two days, engaging a group of representative participants (usually 15-25), led by sLab faculty.

The SDD results are aggregated in an Influence Map, a system that represents a consensus on the relationships amongst a set of design proposals. Both the Influence Map and a summary documentation are prepared rapidly, within the workshop period, using the Cognisystem software. The SDD is a unique engagement platform suitable for the campus/community consultation mapping process.

Dr. Alia Weston, new OCAD U researcher with a PhD in Management and Creativity, will be spearheading the **Informal Economy Research Hub**. This new research portfolio will focus on consulting, planning and developing a new type of maker hub that emerges from marginalized communities with resource-constraints of the Informal Economy sector. Dr. Weston will establish other engagement techniques to be used for the RECODE Catalyst campus/community consultation mapping process that will help OCAD University reach out to marginalized communities.

Project Proposal: Alignment with Existing Initiatives

In addition to the existing activities of the DMRII, the Imagination Catalyst and the Centre for Emerging Artists & Designers, OCAD University has an extensive history as an entrepreneurial University. Our alumni are forming the creative class — drivers of entrepreneurship in Ontario. Over 90% of our faculty have founded creative enterprises and 57% of our alumni are self-employed professionals, while 87% of alumni will operate businesses or work as consultants at some point in their careers, and 17% of alumni have been or are currently a founder of a not-for-profit or for-profit organization, 79% of which are in the cultural sector.¹⁰

OCAD University currently offers 25 courses on entrepreneurship and related social enterprise subjects, ranging from business skills training; such as Digital Business, Monetizing (BUSI3Bo4), Entrepreneurship (BUSI4Bo1) and Introduction to Business (BUSI2Bo); copyrights and intellectual property training, such as IP: Getting Value from Your Creativity (BUSI 2Bo2); to professional practice suited to the pre-professional programs, such as Project Management (BUSI3Bo1), Preparation for Industrial Designers (INDS4Bo9), to Public Art for Sculptors (SCIN4Bo3); and social entrepreneurial training such as Guerilla Entrepreneurship (GDES3Bo6), Business Ethics, Sustainability and Social Responsibility (BUSI3Bo2), and Leadership Skills in the Digital Economy (DIGF4Bo1).

OCAD University's team envisions that the results of a campus/community consultation, mapping and planning process may result in extra-curricular (non-credit) cross-curricular and experiential modules that are externally facing social innovation learning open source modules.

In addition, OCAD University has identified two untapped institutional assets; its Student Entrepreneurial Club and the Open Space Gallery facilities. Both of these assets can be deployed to focus on non-structured “pop-up” programming, events, and other “hacked” ways of community building.

The Student-led Entrepreneurial Club, recently formed and receiving mentoring from the Imagination

Catalyst, can create socially focused “by-student-for-students” consultation and can contribute to the establishment of a portion of an Art & Design social innovation zone.

The DMRII’s Open Space Gallery, located at 49 McCaul Street is an engaging, inclusively designed open space, flexible to use, equipped with built-digital technology to support pop-up events, campus and external outreach activities with minimal effort and cost. This space is an untapped resource for city- wide pop-up events to support a social innovation zone.

Project Proposal: Organizational Structure & Management

OCAD University’s Centre for Emerging Artists & Designers would consult, coordinate, and consolidate the DMRII’s Research Specialist Teams and the Imagination Catalyst. This would include the expanding existing programs and the required activities, and to propose a new campus-wide ecosystem for an Art & Design Social Innovation Zone with the support of the McConnell Foundation’s RECODE Catalyst Fund.

The proposed strategies would include:

1. Campus/community consultation and participatory research phase leading to a complete or partial social innovation zone (to inform the suggestions below).
2. Expand the Social Enterprise incubation & acceleration entrepreneurship programs through the existing formal partnership with the Centre for Social Innovation.
3. Scale-up the CSI partnership with Social Enterprise Ontario and Social Venture Partners
4. Launch the Arts Trader and Design Advantage program.
5. Expand the role of the OCAD U’ Entrepreneurial Club.
6. Host Pop-Up Social enterprise focus events in parallel to build a social enterprise fund to create a small fund for student-led social enterprises.
7. Expand new extended learning offerings to existing community service learning programs for our partnership with Toronto’s Artscape Launchpad.

Project proposal: Change Agency for Research & Curriculum

OCAD University envisions that if the RECODE Catalyst project’s proposed seven strategies are implemented, the following significant outcomes would result:

1. Understand the untapped social innovation interests of our community by extensive participatory research.
2. Discover the potential social entrepreneurs of our community by extensive participatory research.
3. Identify the communities that can be served by the above understanding and discovery process.
4. Establish a research centre of expertise in informal economies.
5. Establish a trust relationship with marginalized communities.
6. Increase the impact of the CSI Collaboration.
7. Increase the global impact with a collaboration between Social Enterprise Ontario.
8. Develop a social enterprise pitch competition with Social Venture Partners to better deploy their seed funding.

9. Tackling student under-employment and its corollary of poverty on campus with the Arts Trader & Design Advantage programs.
10. Provide students with “learning by doing” work experience that can be included in their CVs before graduation and help with student success and degree completion.
11. Foster support “by student-for student” as directed by the Student Entrepreneurial Club and tap into potential volunteers, aiding future philanthropists and creating an economy of giving within the student body.
12. A student body propelled to do more will then in turn demand more from faculty and staff at OCAD University, resulting in collective impact.
13. Build a seed fund to seed social enterprise ideas on campus.
14. Participate in city-building by contributing to the Artscape Launchpad program offerings which will provide skills to the emerging creative class in Toronto.