

*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.*

# **Ryerson University**

## **Scaling up the Social Innovation Ecosystem at Ryerson University, Canada's First Ashoka Changemaker Campus**

### **1. VISION**

Building on its polytechnic tradition and mission “to meet societal need,” <http://www.ryerson.ca/about/accountability/mission.html> Ryerson’s vision is to be Canada’s Comprehensive Innovation University, “mainstreaming” innovation and change-making skills across every faculty, providing leadership in thought and evidence based-action, building the innovation ecosystem and developing the changemakers of tomorrow. Ryerson leverages expertise, experience and networks to ensure that our overall impact is more than the sum of the parts. While we want to help shape the thinking about social innovation in Canada and internationally, we want to be recognized for our leadership doing rather than talking about social innovation. Ashoka’s ‘Changemakers’ designation helps us bridge disciplinary and ideological boundaries to inspire everyone to be a Changemaker. Diversity is a particularly important feature of our social innovation strategy and, along with “city building” is a crosscutting theme.

### **2. OUR APPROACH: INCLUSIVE, CROSS DISCIPLINARY**

Social innovation aims to solve complex, real-world problems, and to create positive and tangible societal impact. With the largest entrepreneurship program in Canada and more than 300 courses with innovation and entrepreneurship components, Ryerson has embedded innovation and entrepreneurship, whether aimed at for profit or social goals, across campus. Ryerson approaches social innovation as inclusive and multidisciplinary including the development of new solutions to problems, the creation of new ventures, driving change within existing organizations and large systems. To provide focus, it organizes thematically around the UN Millennial Goals - Poverty Alleviation [and Youth Employment], Education, Health, Human Rights, Diversity and Inclusion, Violence Prevention and Peacebuilding, Sustainability, and Capacity Building and Engagement.

Ryerson is a leader in embedding innovation across the University. In our internationally recognized incubator – the Digital Media Zone (DMZ) – almost 25% of ventures have social goals. Ryerson also has a new Civic Ventures Zone – focused on fostering civic innovations and social entrepreneurial activities. There are also many unique social innovation projects in our Institutes and Centres, including the Centre for Urban Energy, the Diversity Institute, the Institute for Corporate Social Responsibility, the Centre for Indigenous Governance, and many more. Through workshops, competitions, credit courses, and incubators, we are creating more and more opportunities for social innovators and changemaking student groups like Alternative Spring Break, Engineers without Borders, SAGE, and Enactus to thrive and grow. Our Ashoka Changemaker Strategy identified many areas of strength – our community and culture, our leadership, diverse and extensive teaching and curriculum, extensive applied learning and apprenticeship opportunities, and research. At the same time, among 22 characteristics, we identified 6 areas to strengthen. Specifically

- Measure of outcomes
- Engage of student affairs staff
- Develop a well-structured framework and roadmap for curriculum
- Provide the entire campus with meaningful opportunities
- Strengthen the coordination of stakeholders across the university
- Develop a multi-year funding model providing the resources to support and grow our programs.

While new approaches to solving society's most intractable and difficult social problems are desperately needed, most of Canada's innovation strategy has focused on supporting traditional technology-based entrepreneurs. We are working to level the playing field and to find new solutions to address social problems and to further develop the social innovation ecosystem. Ryerson's Changemaker strategy has an action orientation and emphasizes learning by doing. It includes several key elements 1) increasing awareness and engagement in social innovation across faculties, 2) building capacity for social innovation 3) supporting applied research, social innovation projects and experiential learning, 4) Advancing evidence based action, social impact and best practices and 5) Strengthening communication and knowledge mobilization.

### **1. Increase Awareness of and Engagement in Social Innovation Across Faculties:**

- Enhance awareness and support for activities, events, and competitions that encourage social innovation, particularly among youth and those facing barriers.
- Leverage the energy of students to reach other students through the Ashoka Changemaker Student Committee.

**Current Status:** In 2013/14, the Ashoka Changemaker Steering Committee hosted seven major events attended by over 535 students, faculty, staff, and external audiences; a total of 10 student groups, including Sage, Enactus, Alternative Spring Break, Ryerson International Experiential Learning program, Suit Up for Success, the Ryerson Water Environment Association of Ontario (RU-WEAO), actively engaged with the Ashoka "RU a Changemaker" Student Committee, fundraising events, promotion of programs and competitions, and other partnerships and collaborations.

**Planned:** In 2014/15, a part-time Ashoka Steering Committee Student coordinator will help keep projects on track and seed funding will be provided for student-led initiatives.

### **2. Build Capacity for Social Innovation**

- Provide and access a clearinghouse of materials to enhance critical understanding of social innovation and the tools to develop and execute innovative ideas.
- Support research and professional development opportunities to assist faculty in developing learning materials and embedding social innovation concepts and experiences.
- Develop a strong network of coaches and mentors to advise social innovators at every stage of their development, as well as encourage peer-to-peer support systems.
- Ensure that diversity is a cross cutting theme. Partner to advance under-represented groups, building on successful initiatives, for example, targeting

young women, youth facing barriers, priority neighborhoods in Toronto, Aboriginal youth, and others.

**Current:** Ryerson currently has extensive curriculum related to social entrepreneurship. It has the largest entrepreneurship program in Canada and a 2011 survey revealed almost 100 courses at Ryerson with substantial content related to entrepreneurship and innovation. The university has led for more than 20 years in Non-profit Management with a Certificate and a minor, public administration, service learning and driving social change. More recently it has embraced the opportunity to consider new approaches to social innovation. This year, pilot courses included “Exploring Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship,” with a field trip to Ashoka jointly led by Community Services and the Ted Rogers School of Management, a ‘zone learning’ skills-based course with 16 students entitled “Community Action Research - From Idea to Possibility,” led by the Faculty of Arts; a pan-Canadian course led by Senator Ken Dryden and in partnership with McGill, Calgary, Saskatchewan, Bishops, and Simon Fraser University as well as the Summer Start-up School (Zone Learning @CUE), for students interested in developing an innovative idea in energy research into a business venture. A Social Innovation Minor is under-development and new courses have been added to the Ryerson MBA. Ryerson is the only university provider of Ontario’s Summer Company Program, supporting over 50 youth -- recruited from under-represented groups -- who plan to return to school, running their own business over the summer, many of them socially-focused ventures.

**Planned:** Curriculum development will continue through the normal process supported through the Deans of the respective faculties, financed by the University.

### 3. Support Applied Research, Social Innovation Projects, and Experiential Learning

- Provide seed and matching funds for social innovation initiatives including new ventures and projects driving innovation in existing organizations.
- Expand capacity of Ryerson’s zones and institutes with social innovation elements – the DMZ, the Civic Ventures Zone, iCUE, and others – to support social innovation across the university, and more importantly, with partner organizations.

**Current:** Currently, social innovators in DMZ and iCUE incubators receive workspace, mentorship, and access to customers and funders. However, limited resources support social innovation initiatives outside of the DMZ and iCUE. Moreover, most funding programs (e.g., iSTEM, FedDev’s Scientists and Engineers in Business (SEB) program, ARC, MITACS, etc.) focus on for-profit and technology-based innovations. Ryerson has strenuously advocated for new models to support innovation in the nonprofit sector and for women, youth facing barriers, persons with disabilities and other under-represented groups. Ryerson created four Scientists and Engineering Business Fellowships in Social Innovation, 30 social innovation-related MITACs projects, won four of seven OCE/SSHRC fellowships, and helped persuade MITACs to support nonprofits. But more is needed.

**Planned:** In 2014/15 and 2015/16, Funds will be directed at providing seed funding to high potential social enterprise and social innovation projects, on a competitive basis, through a cross-disciplinary Adjudication Panel. We estimate that there are currently approximately

30 social innovation startups at Ryerson and we aim to at least double this number over the two years of the program and to build in requirements for assessments.

#### **4. Advance the Assessment of Evidence Based Action, Social Impact and the Development of Best Practices**

- Support research to explore stories of success and failure, systems approaches, new techniques, and social impact.
- Improve tracking of processes, documentation and evaluation of results and leading practices.
- Encourage collaborative research across faculties, with partners and other institutions.

**Current:** Many Ryerson researchers work on social innovation although they may not self-identify as social innovators. Ryerson received two major Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) grants, related to enhancing social determinates of health among First Nations in Northern Ontario and a Diversity Institute project that promotes diversity among leadership. Several proposals specifically targeting social innovation research have been undertaken, one with Queens and McGill University, and another pan-Canadian proposal with ten Universities. Ryerson is also part of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, which includes significant social innovation components and Ryerson researchers participate in social innovation conferences, including the Ashoka U Exchange, the Deshpande Symposium on Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the UN Social Innovation Summit, the Stern Conference on Social Entrepreneurship, and the Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship, Queens Social Innovation Bootcamp in the last year alone.

**Planned:** By providing seed funds for individual and collaborative and interdisciplinary research, this initiative will help advance knowledge and the dissemination of knowledge, research, and best practices. Particular focus will be placed on evaluation and developing evaluation frameworks and encouraging collaboration. A substantial portion of the research funding (typically 50%) will go to supporting student research assistants, thereby building the next generation of social innovators.

#### **5. Strengthen Communications and Knowledge Mobilization**

- Encourage discussion, collaboration, information sharing, and access to resources on social innovation across campus and in the broader ecosystem – locally, nationally – and with other academic and NGO centers around the globe.
- Contribute to the national platform to share stories, best practices, strategies, and tools.
- Work closely with private sector companies, non-profits, and government agencies to build awareness, share information, inform research, and drive collaboration, both locally and globally.

**Current:** One of the biggest challenges at Ryerson has been coordinating and sharing information across the University, given the number and diversity of social innovation activities and opportunities. While the Ashoka Changemaker Steering Committee has compiled extensive databases of experts, activities and opportunities which it distributes through regular bulletins, brochures etc., Ryerson's internal communications could be improved and the social innovation website needs work to become a go-to resource linked to other resources. While knowledge mobilization activities have been extensive – with a

host of social innovation workshops, events, publicity and conferences – there is huge demand for additional support. In 2013/14, 10 faculty and 20 students attended seven social innovation conferences, but there is huge appetite for more.

**Planned:** Enhance the internal and external knowledge mobilization strategy ensuring that the social innovation website serves as a clearinghouse and is linked to key resources across the country and around the world. Improve documentation of social innovation activities. and knowledge dissemination of leading practices.

## **IMPACT ON TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

As outlined in detail in our approach (Section 2), if funded, this investment will extend social innovation opportunities to a broader base of students and alumni. Surveys show almost 50% of Ryerson students (15,000) now consider starting their own venture as a career option. Some formally study entrepreneurship or social innovation but many engage in extracurricular activities and workshops and come to see themselves as social entrepreneurs. The Loodariak Maasai Women's Beading Collective was created by a Social Work Graduate and Suit up for Success by an Arts and Contemporary studies student. In 2013/14, we estimate that approximately 10% of Ryerson students were involved in a socially innovative project or initiative, and of these, we estimate that 20% are social in their focus. Currently more than 200 students currently participate in one of the innovation zones on campus, a number we expect to grow dramatically with the expansion of facilities. The Transformation Fund will allow us to launch initiatives aimed at all first-year students and to develop the pipeline for social ventures and applied research, as well as faculty-led research and projects. Funding will also allow us to expand our co-curricular and extra-curricular experiential learning and social innovation opportunities, further challenging our students to develop new solutions to address complex, social issues. Ryerson is a national leader in social innovation and this funding will allow us to share that expertise across Canada, helping to position us as a global leader.

## **PLANNING PROCESS & METHODS OF EVALUATION TO BE USED**

Moving forward, Ryerson's planning process will be multi-staged. In order to evaluate the impact of this program, we will make use of various quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods (e.g., surveys, exit interviews, town halls, etc.) to ensure continuous monitoring and yearly benchmarking of the progress made. As part of our commitment to CLA, we are developing better metrics to assess the efficacy and reach of our programs. For example, in order to more clearly track the progress of companies that have left the Ryerson ecosystem, we are increasing our capacity in Zone alumni engagement. Companies, social ventures, and non-profit groups leaving our Zones take part in exit interviews that provide us with an understanding of the effect of their program and areas for improvement. Ryerson also utilizes the digital solution Soapbox, an online platform for community-based change, which allows individuals to share their idea with key decision makers. For our student population, Ryerson tracks student involvement in credit courses and other curriculum-related involvement through its registrar and alumni office. Through the use of anonymous campus-wide surveys, Ryerson is measuring engagement and satisfaction with the University's entrepreneurship programs and services. To help guide direction and impact of these, Ryerson holds open 'town hall' meetings open to the entire university community. To ensure student voices are heard consistently, there are student representatives from all Faculties on Zone steering committees, e.g., the Ashoka Steering Committee, the Zone Leaders group, and the Civic Ventures Zone Committee. Finally, Ryerson is working with Social Asset Measurement Inc. (SAM), a consulting and software company that will help Ryerson organizations, projects, and initiatives measure, manage, and demonstrate their social impact or Social Return on Investment (SROI). Ryerson will support program evaluation

through MEDTE/MRI funds. Specifically, Ryerson will evaluate the project’s objectives using the following key performance indicators:

**Table 3: Key Performance Indicators**

1. Increase Awareness of & Engagement in SI	2. Build Capacity for SI	3. Support Applied Research, SI Projects & Experiential Learning	4. Advance Assessment of Social Impact & Best Practices	5. Strengthen Communications & KM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-# of students participating</li> <li>-# of students exposed to entrepreneurship activities</li> <li>-# of social innovation events hosted</li> <li>-Perceptions of students, faculty, and staff</li> <li>-# of participants in social innovation events (e.g., hack-o-thons)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-# of social innovation courses, competitions, workshops, extra curricular activities</li> <li>-Student involvement in credit and non-credit social innovation courses</li> <li>-# of institutional and community partnerships formed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-# of applied research projects</li> <li>-# of experiential learning opportunities</li> <li>-# of ventures created</li> <li>-# of successful projects</li> <li>-Amount of financing (in-kind and other resources) attracted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workshops</li> <li>- Guidelines and toolkits</li> <li>-Partnerships</li> <li>- Improved tracking of social return on Investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-# publications, workshops, visits</li> <li>-# of faculty publications</li> <li>-# of conferences attended</li> <li>- partnerships and collaborations</li> </ul>