

*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.*

# **Seneca College**

## **The HELIX Initiative (Health Entrepreneurship Lifestyle Innovation Xchange)**

### **Social Innovation at Seneca College: Aspirations and Vision**

Business innovation is the adoption of new knowledge or practices to solve problems and develop new or improved products, processes or services with a goal of profit generation. Social innovation can be seen as the development of a product, process or service that responds to social needs, with an ultimate goal of improved civil society. Seneca believes that the two concepts of business innovation and social innovation can be integrated for both economic and social benefit. As one of the largest colleges in Canada with over 25,000 full time students and 8,000 graduates annually across 10 campuses in the Greater Toronto Area, and offering 145 academic programs across all major discipline areas, Seneca aspires to develop a leadership role among colleges in aligning the business and social innovation spheres. Seneca's Strategic Plan (2012-2017) identifies three major themes, all focused on producing the knowledgeable and skilled graduates needed for employment success and civic engagement. The first, cross-disciplinary experiences, provides students with an ability to think and work across disciplines, such as business, information technology and health. The second is to ensure that all students have an opportunity for experiential learning, and the development of entrepreneurial skills and capacity. The final theme is the establishment of clear pathways for graduates to further education or to the world of business.

Seneca aspires to encourage students from all disciplines to think and ultimately act within and across their disciplines for the benefit of an economically prosperous and a healthy, sustainable society. Such an aspiration is well suited to a modern post-secondary educator and will provide "students and their communities with tools and resources for carrying out adaptive change" in society (RECODE objective #4).

### **Social Entrepreneurship at Seneca College: Aspirations and Vision**

Social entrepreneurship measures the results of activities, products, and services in terms of social value. Social entrepreneurs may work in for-profit or not-for-profit businesses, or provide volunteer services for a diversity of organizations serving societal needs. To a degree, social entrepreneurship is a way of thinking, the constant reflection about a product, process, service, or activity in the context of its societal impact. Seneca College trains many entrepreneurs in a wide variety of business programs, and many of its graduates have created successful business ventures. Seneca College received a recent award as the "most entrepreneurial college in Ontario", by Startup Canada. The College has also recently been approved by the Ontario Centres of Excellence to establish an "On-Campus Entrepreneurship Activities" (OCEA) training initiative and incubator that will focus on the development of youth-led business ventures in the personal health products and services

sector. Seneca also aspires to develop cross-disciplinary thinkers and social innovators who may impact the next generation of socially-engaged business enterprises. To this end, Seneca proposes to utilize the new OCEA as a catalyst to advance its social innovation goal. Activities in the proposed HELIX initiative will be coordinated by the Faculties of Business, Applied Science and Engineering Technology, and Communication Arts and Design for business product development, and by the Faculty of Applied Arts and Health Sciences for leadership in the application sector of personal health products and services. Learning from the HELIX venture will contribute to Seneca's ability to create new academic curriculum focusing on social innovation and youth entrepreneurship as part of its new programming priorities.

## **Proposal to Achieve Seneca's Social Innovation Vision**

The overall goal of Seneca's proposal to the McConnell Foundation is to integrate business and social innovation by using the vehicle of Seneca's new On-Campus Entrepreneurship Activities (OCEA) initiative. The added-value of the social impact context to business entrepreneurship activities may profoundly change the nature of those activities, resulting in more socially-responsive product development processes, products and services, and market testing procedures. Innovative ideas to address societal problems are expected to result.

The HELIX initiative builds on and leverages the funding and in-kind support already in place for the OCEA initiative being launched in Summer, 2014. The purpose of the OCEA is to foster youth-led business ventures that focus on personal health products and services, employing leading edge technology as well as effective usability and design thinking. It is fundamentally cross-disciplinary, involving several academic schools and a wide variety of business and non-business programs. The focus in the early stages of the OCEA on personal health products and services involves a natural alliance with the health and community service sectors of the College, with their well-established community involvement and partnerships. This alliance will bring a relevant social context to all elements of the business development process. McConnell funding is being sought to enhance Seneca's on-campus entrepreneurship initiative to: a) bring social innovation contexts to business products and services to address personal and societal health, b) develop new curriculum linked to entrepreneurship and healthy, socially responsible lifestyles, and c) better enable Seneca to engage community partners that share an interest in healthy lifestyles across the lifespan.

Personal health and the interest in person-centred formal health services, health promotion (including the WHO determinants of health model), and general interest and investment in healthy lifestyles has expanded dramatically in developed countries in the last two decades. This in turn has created significant commercial opportunities impacting sectors such as personal health indicator tracking, exercise strategies, sports and recreation, cognitive health, diet and nutrition, and social networking. According to a recent report from Accenture, by 2020 the healthcare market is forecasted to become more patient-centric, technology-driven and integrated among healthcare stakeholders. Opportunities for customized products and services are enhanced by the utilization of multiple communication platforms from mobile phones and smart watches to real-time health sensors; and by advanced technologies such as nano-technology and robotics.

The way that people use these technologies has also changed dramatically over the last decade. Good user experience is not simply a wish – it is a part of a user's expectations.

Customers seek products and services with sound design principles that create user-friendly experiences. With growing user sensitivity to the overall health of society and the environment, “making things work well for the user” is more than just a requirement for commercial success; it is also increasingly a foundational requirement for positive social impact. User-focused concerns such as security and ways to manage the proliferation of online reference materials are directly applicable to larger societal concerns.

The proposed HELIX initiative will be fully integrated into the work plan, deliverables, tools and techniques of the OCEA itself. Activities will focus on two streams:

- Stream I: Enhancement of existing entrepreneurship activities
- Stream II – Cross-disciplinary incubator experience

### **Stream I Activities**

OCEA operations will begin in July, 2014, and are capable of immediately integrating social innovation concepts and structures into its plans and activities. With the cross-disciplinary nature of Seneca faculty engagement, to some degree such integration will happen as a matter of course. However, McConnell support will formalize and accelerate such integration.

The OCEA advisory committee, comprised of business and economic development organizations in York Region, will become the HELIX advisory committee and be enhanced by representatives of the not-for-profit sector. The development of informational materials, youth recruitment strategies, establishment of campus space, etc. will be completed by early September, 2014, and will incorporate HELIX requirements throughout the planning stages. The McConnell Foundation may be assured that its priorities and social impact vision will be addressed during the early planning and implementation stages of the OCEA initiative.

Applications from youth entrepreneurs into HELIX Stream I will be accepted in Fall, 2014 from a variety of sources: Seneca students, alumni, faculty, community partner organizations and universities. Some will have business backgrounds while others will bring health, design, and community service knowledge and experiences together with an entrepreneurial spirit. It is anticipated that between 100-150 youth will express an interest in registering for Stream I. The addition of a social innovation focus will likely increase this number to 200+, resulting in a larger intake of 150 potential personal health products and services entrepreneurs.

These youths will have access to the following activities and resources:

- 4-6 entrepreneur seminars delivered by Seneca experts, community organization partners or entrepreneurs. Social innovation concepts will be incorporated into these seminars as a key component of successful entrepreneurship.
- Free entrepreneurial aptitude testing
- Access to the Virtual Entrepreneur Market Place, a web portal that will function as the HELIX master database for information on registration, events, opportunities, mentoring appointments, announcements, key literature links, etc.
- Access to “drop-in” office hours held by HELIX staff each week to enable informal mentoring and discussions

Stream I registrants will be invited to participate in the Seneca Innovation and Entrepreneurship Day in November, 2014. In addition to networking sessions and keynote

presentations from leaders in the social and business entrepreneurship field, selected registrant teams will pitch their personal health products and services business ideas, and demonstrate how these ideas meet social innovation goals or potentially solve social, environmental, or community health issues. Up to 20 ventures identified as ready for further development into products or services will move to Stream II – HELIX Inc. (Incubator).

**Stream II**, from January to May, 2015, will provide youth entrepreneurs with a cross-disciplinary incubation experience that includes:

- Access to dedicated HELIX Inc. physical work space shared by all youth entrepreneurs
- Access to a series of 4-6 on-campus entrepreneur and social entrepreneur seminars delivered by Seneca experts, community organization partners, or entrepreneurs, including those in the non-for-profit sector
- Competitive access to \$5-8,000 “seed capital” for selected venture teams. McConnell Foundation support will fund those applicants with product or service concepts that meet social innovation priorities. It is quite possible that partnerships with existing companies (for-profit or not-for-profit) will occur or new companies/organizations will form during this period;
- Access to mentors (subject matter experts) from the fields of technology, design, business, health, or community service. Each HELIX Inc. venture will have a specially selected mentoring team based on the venture’s specific goals and needs.
- Access to a customized hybrid entrepreneurial training program. This program will be developed as part of the HELIX initiative. Over time, training modules will be incorporated into regular Seneca College program curriculum across all major academic sectors by the academic leadership team for the initiative.
- Access to a password protected site within the Virtual Entrepreneur Market Place for individual business venture activities and file sharing
- Access to a specific market test pool of volunteers to pilot and test a prototype of a proposed product or service
- Access to collaborative support and advice from peer entrepreneurs

At the completion of Stream II, youth entrepreneurs will be expected to meet the following deliverables:

- High quality business plan presenting a viable personal health product or service, with clear articulation of how it meets social innovation priorities
- Customer validation of the business opportunity through a report on market test results
- Strategy and materials to present the business concept to those who can facilitate their path forward (e.g., banks, partner organizations, angel investors, property owners, etc.)

It is anticipated that up to 20 HELIX “graduate entrepreneurs” annually will be encouraged and supported to access one of Seneca’s partners in the York Region and through extended partners across the Toronto region and beyond. Partners already committed and supporting the OCEA project as it unfolds in Spring, 2014 include ventureLAB, York Region Small Business Centres in Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan, and regional economic

development organizations as well as the Southlake Regional Health Centre, a community and regional acute care health facility. Southlake will provide HELIX entrepreneurs and product design teams with access to 400 clinicians as potential mentors or product testers. New partners will be brought on board with social entrepreneurship experience.