

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.

Simon Fraser University

Introduction

Post-secondary institutions have a crucial role to play in helping our communities and country adapt to an increasingly complex set of problems and opportunities, and are themselves subject to immense pressures. Embracing this means stepping up to the challenge of preparing a new generation of leaders who will confront this unpredictable future, tapping in to the immense knowledge generation and natural convening power of the institution, and re-imagining our roles as active community partners and problem solvers. Our work in building a Simon Fraser University (SFU) Social Innovation Zone helps position SFU as a global leader in social innovation and social entrepreneurship, and creates a permeable wall between the university and impact community. This is perfectly aligned with SFU's vision to be Canada's most engaged university.

What is your vision for how social innovation can flourish at your institution?

We believe SFU is particularly well placed to act on the vision for social innovation we begin to articulate above. We are 50 years young, imagined to be unlike any other in Canada. In the words of Hugh Johnson, institutional historian and author of the book *Radical Campus* (given to new faculty hires at SFU):

“SFU came into existence when it was revolutionary to think that a new university could be an academic leader....SFU had its start when governments were beginning to look to new universities for innovation - because they were free of the weight of established practice. ...The spirit with which SFU began was deliberately one of doing things differently...”

Fifty years later, RADIUS¹ (**RAD**ical Ideas, **U**seful to **S**ociety) was born of this same spirit and at a time when SFU strives “to be the leading engaged university defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research, and far-reaching community engagement”. A place for ‘Radical Doers’, RADIUS is positioned to drive the vision for an SFU Social Innovation Zone, to tap into the spirit of the engaged campus, and to help continue SFU's historical mandate as a hub of innovation and social change.

Social innovation will flourish here through harnessing these strengths into a compelling vision for SFU as a global social innovation leader, deeply connected to society's need to tackle increasingly complex and systemic challenges, while addressing students' tough questions about the value and relevancy of their education in helping them build careers rooted in purpose. On the ground, we enact this vision through:

- building a core team with the entrepreneurial spirit to try new things, embrace risk, and balance this action with humility;
- supporting and connecting existing programs, and co-creating with current leaders;

- developing and delivering new programs where needed to improve student experience, support emerging innovators and ideas, and directly tackle meaningful social problems;
- engaging senior leadership to ensure continued support;
- and developing a strategic partnership and resourcing strategy to sustain our efforts.

What is your vision for how social entrepreneurship can flourish at your institution?

We define success by SFU's ability to unleash more 'Radical Doers' and 'Radical Ideas' in action. This means any student can find a peer community and appropriate guidance for their stage of learning and development. It also means working closely with partners to help unearth and advance new models, and supporting the brightest ideas and innovators from SFU and our surrounding communities along a continuum from classroom and ideation, through incubation, and growth or replication if appropriate. Our progress to date already includes success in developing and supporting truly innovative approaches to experiential learning with internal and external partners, building powerful social venture support programming in collaboration with Vancity, and developing our capacity to understand complex challenges while identifying and testing interventions with partners like Ecotrust Canada.

From a student perspective we believe the success of social entrepreneurship hinges on understanding this journey of the Doer. If students are engaged early and provided real opportunities to understand, experience and practice the pursuit of solutions to social problems, they will develop the skillset and mentality of changemakers, gravitate to problems and ideas that are important to them, and help build solutions that matter. We liken it to finding a switch that engages a young person's agency – once you flip that switch it is impossible to turn off. SFU has wonderful examples of programs and leaders doing this, several noted below, and a key goal is to highlight, support, and connect much of this excellent existing work.

What types of activities, practices, programs or structures are you proposing?

While the nature of this work can and should remain emergent, this proposal is built on the foundation of existing RADIUS program structures with a greatly enhanced emphasis on coordination, collaboration, and collective impact strategies to address gaps and opportunities across SFU. Based on the belief that addressing complex challenges demands more and better innovators, a deeper understanding of complex problems, and more support for high potential ideas, our initial key program areas are:

RADIUS Edu

RADIUS Edu works on the future of education for social innovation, to unleash a generation of Radical Doers capable of creating solutions to tough social problems. This includes understanding and supporting the journey of the emerging social innovator at SFU; identifying and connecting existing offerings and pathways; developing new curricular and extra-curricular learning models; and building a strong culture and community of social innovation. This is the foundational work upon which student facing activities of a social innovation zone will be built, and we are already creating collaborations between with numerous faculties, departments, student groups and initiatives. Sample programs and projects include:

Ashoka Badge Collaboration – Creation of a SocEnt 101 badge, based on definitions and a survey of illustrative examples in the Canadian sector. Open source, for use by instructors for course material or as a gateway to programs or competitions, or by individual learners interested in a basic introduction.

Change Lab – Created and facilitated by RADIUS Edu Manager Jennifer McRae, this interdisciplinary course combines faculty and credits (7 units/two courses) from the Beedie School of Business and Faculty of Environment. Focused on solving social problems, it allows for venture, systems/policy, project/movement based outcomes and is project based and deeply experiential.

Social Venture Accelerator – started by RADIUS founder Shawn Smith, this course is a 7 week bootcamp for student teams from anywhere at SFU with existing ideas. Piloted twice, its success drove the creation of BUS 406, a 3 credit course instructors can use to run this and related “accelerator” experiences.

Social Innovation Fellows, Incubator & Seed Fund – Designed to plug some of the significant gaps between courses and more intensive accelerator programs, this incubation program will build a community of emerging social innovators, access to seed funding, peer learning opportunities, and ongoing advice and support.

RADIUS Lab

RADIUS Lab is where we go deep with community partners to learn how to better solve tough social problems. Each Lab is unique, working with partners on a specific problem and intended set of outcomes; training graduate Fellows to join Lab teams; and identifying, testing and launching solutions.

Our goals are: a) learn how to better approach complex social problems, and improve the problem solving capacity of our partners; b) build a powerful talent pipeline for social innovation in Canada; and c) develop and launch impactful (scalable/replicable) interventions for important social challenges in Canada.

The Ecotrust Lab @RADIUS began an exploration phase in 2012 focused on innovations for economies

serving people and place. We have formalized this with a new 3 year collaboration focused on urban economic innovation in Vancouver’s inner city, planning for 30 paid graduate social innovation internships.

RADIUS Ventures

Focused on accelerating high potential teams and ideas, RADIUS Ventures partners with impact ventures to get them market, growth, and investor ready. We work with ventures from SFU, Vancouver and beyond: two of the five in our first cohort began in an SFU classroom; one joined from Edmonton. Skeptical of the light touch approach of many programs, we strive for what we call “ Δ R”, a significant trajectory change in each venture we work with, directly attributable to our work. We also take a systems-based approach and work with sectoral clusters, allowing entrepreneurs to learn more from each other and receive more tailored support, while improving our understanding of systemic barriers and opportunities. We

have observed that this allows our “Radical Ventures” to find higher order impact opportunities and sustainable models.

Our inaugural cohort wrapped up in May, working with five ventures focused on sustainable transportation and local food. Each company made real headway, with examples like Localize expanding from Alberta into BC, Shift adding new revenue streams and getting clear on a path to sustainability, and startup go2gether landing its significant funding and three major clients.

In coming months we will pilot a summer ideas accelerator for earlier stage entrepreneurs, continue our popular “Office Hours” where entrepreneurs book free 45 minute initial consultations, launch Cohort 2 with a new theme in September, and explore an exciting Incentive Challenge with CityStudio and the City of Vancouver, seeking entrepreneurial solutions to meaningful challenges faced by Vancouver and its citizens.

All of this work is underpinned by an intensive effort to develop coordination with other programs (see below), as well as clarity and access for SFU students, faculty, staff and community partners.

How do they align with existing initiatives and your institution’s strategic priorities?

In the words of President Petter describing what it means to be an engaged university, it is SFU’s ambition to “...to utilize every resource we have for social betterment.” SFU is committed to being a hub for solutions to pressing social challenges. The Social Innovation Zone initiative provides a unique opportunity to integrate and align much of SFU’s exemplary work, deepen our collective institutional impact and emerge as a national and international leader in this burgeoning field.

Aligned Examples Include

SFU Public Square exists to convene serious and productive conversations about issues of public concern in BC and to assemble the hearts, minds and talents of diverse communities to promote inclusive, intelligent and inspiring dialogue.

Semester in Dialogue is a one term full time program to inspire a sense of civic responsibility and passion for improving society. Each semester offers an original, interdisciplinary experience bridging classroom and community and helps students to reflect on what they are doing and why it matters.

SFU Sustainability Office was established to support SFU’s Sustainability Strategic Plan, to support and facilitate the University-wide effort to implement the plan, to maintain programs already established, and to develop new programs to support University-wide sustainability initiatives.

Centre for Sustainable Community Development aims to integrate economic, social and environmental objectives in community development. Founded in 1989 and based in the Faculty of Environment, it provides research, training and advisory services, and offers an

undergraduate certificate and post-baccalaureate diploma, graduate support, and non-credit professional programs.

Sustainable SFU Sustainable SFU is a student-led not-for-profit working toward a sustainable future at all three SFU campuses. They provide sustainability advocacy, programming, and academic and professional development opportunities for over 35,000 undergraduate and graduate student members.

CityStudio is an innovation hub inside Vancouver City Hall where staff, university students and community members design and execute projects on the ground.

Enactus SFU is a student run chapter whose vision is to be leaders in the community who go beyond the ambiguities of theory and apply their knowledge to solve real challenges that affect real people.

Net Impact is a community of more than 50,000 student and professionals creating positive social and environmental change in the workplace and world. They have an active and supportive chapter at SFU.

We have good relationships with each of these initiatives, and have received broad support for the idea that RADIUS can play an enabling role for this emergent network of initiatives.

Finally, we have also been involved in a number of conversations and initiatives that demonstrate commitment and alignment, including: RADIUS space in 2016 plans for a residence building and 4000 sq ft innovation and entrepreneurship hub in Vancouver; forming the heart of social innovation activities in a joint SFU and Vancity proposal for a 'Vancouver Centre for Social Innovation and Inclusion' in 2013 (currently not proceeding); a new Joint Major in Sustainable Business offered between the Beedie School of Business and Faculty of Environment; and a proposed Certificate in Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

How might this change the teaching, research and/or student experience at SFU?

Of these, our primary focus to date has been on the student experience, which we believe will have a long-term influence on the teaching and research experience at SFU. As noted in the introduction, students are entering a rapidly changing world that will present radically different challenges and opportunities.

Universities must go beyond teaching and research to provide transformative opportunities to become Doers, entrepreneurs and innovators for society. Tangible immediate impacts of our work will include:

- A consistent, visible roadmap for interested students. As documented, there are significant existing opportunities for SFU students to engage in social innovation experiences, however they are not easily found or well connected. Our initial focus will be mapping and connecting these opportunities, increasing access, participation and impact.
- Beyond mapping the route for those that self-identify, we are working to create more and higher profile entry points and 'in between' catalytic experiences for students.

- New opportunities, programs and incubation support for student Doers with project and venture ideas emerging from curricular and co-curricular experiences.
- Adding dedicated capacity and expertise to support experiential, project based, and/or interdisciplinary approaches to social innovation learning, as well as focus on developing more than just skills but a heads, hands and heart approach to educating changemakers.

SFU has many innovative instructors and there is significant correlation between those interested in disruptive education models and interest in social innovation. We will highlight existing work, allowing for wider profile, recognition and inspiration, and also seek funding to support extraordinary teaching experiences and documentation of successful models. We are documenting the successful SFU Change Lab program and creating a simple toolkit for instructors to replicate or incorporate pieces of the model. We are interested broadly in the potential to develop and incubate new approaches to social innovation education.

Academic research has not been a primary focus, but Advisory Chair Dr. Blaize Reich will personally prioritize this development, including connections to existing research activities across the university where there is deep experience and expertise in social innovation related fields. Dr. Reich has impressive experience building new program areas, including Canada's highly successful Business Technology Management program. A central node and information broker for partnership and funding opportunities, engaging in our own action research, and raising the profile of SFU researchers and organizations close to SFU will all contribute to more robust research opportunities. We are seeking opportunities to connect incubated ventures and Lab projects with researchers, and have discussed the potential for small grants to incentivize social innovation research and cases, as demonstrated by the Skoll Centre through Pear Foundation funding.