

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.

Vancouver Island University

This request to the RECODE grant will provide the catalyst that VIU needs to transform our internal capacity to incubate a resilient social economy in the Islands region. By encouraging systems change at the institutional and community level, VIU will become an incubator for social enterprises and diversified, community-based economies throughout the communities we serve. We envision a project in which faculty and staff gain the insights, tools and supports needed to prepare a diverse range of students and our community partners to be innovative thinkers and social entrepreneurs who can thrive in a Social Economy.

VIU is uniquely situated as a primarily undergraduate, regional university that has grown from a community college model, so it is very well embedded in community and engaged at the grassroots level with regional issues. Through this project, we will unleash the capacity of our undergraduate students and engage our Masters students in innovative entrepreneurial initiatives.

To create transformative change at the university and throughout the region, we will develop a Certificate in Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship that will be delivered to faculty, staff, a diverse range of students and our community partners, including the student-led Campus Food Movement and the Healthy Communities Coordinator at VIU and with Cowichan Tribes through our Cowichan campus.

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

With the funding from RECODE we aspire to:

- Use transformational educational approaches to deepen VIU's culture and practices to develop and support a culture of design thinking, social innovation and social entrepreneurship across many faculties.
- Grow the promising practices and courses that are already in place at VIU through reallocating resources to support interdisciplinary collaborations, innovation infusion events and the creation of innovation hubs with the engaged faculties and other aligned spaces at the campuses (i.e. Research centres, Campus Career Centre).
- Create events, festivals and awards to build awareness and celebrate innovators at all levels; students, administration, faculty, First Nations and other community innovators.
- Create hubs of innovation that involve students, community and industry partners (along with faculty, staff and administrators) that align with regional niche priorities (ie Artisanal food in Cowichan, healthy aging in Parksville-Qualicum, and Indigenomics in Cowichan and Nanaimo and other coastal communities).
- Integrate Social Economy education across disciplines to create opportunities for collaboration amongst faculty and students so that new methods of working together to explore cultural, economic, environmental and social issues are nurtured and supported.

In order to focus our work during the course of this project, we will support social enterprise and entrepreneurial development as an intervention in food-related issues that are impacting our students and the coastal communities that we serve. Food system transformation is a critical undertaking in the current climate of growing food insecurity across the country, particularly with vulnerable populations. Food systems in Canada and across the globe are at a crossroads - the required transformation is much more profound than simply tweaking the existing industrial food system. It is our intention to contribute to broader systemic change by engaging in second-order change (social cognition approach) of the food systems within our own institution and the regions we serve.

Trends occurring amongst Indigenous peoples mark the beginnings of a new era of Indigenous food sovereignty. By establishing their own projects under their own leadership, Indigenous peoples are determining what should be grown, cooked, taught, and shared. Indigenous stewardship practices and traditional knowledge of the land may help Canadian society appreciate its responsibilities to steward water and foodlands for greater food security.

Cowichan Tribes currently delivers *Buckets of Buses*, which is a program to provide nutritious lunches for children in various schools, encouraging a healthy lifestyle and enhancing achievement of students. They also offer *Active Measures*, which provides mentoring support to students of the Introduction to Culinary program to include one / one direct mentoring support, training allowances, provision of work related clothing, provision of mentoring workshops, assistance with transportation needs and lunches.

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

The university will position itself as an “anchor institution” that can transform the local economic base by creating a variety of Innovation Hubs. During the course of this project, we will engage in food systems transformation at VIU as an entry point into honing our expertise and deepening our engagement with Social Economy development. To achieve this, we will focus on bolstering regional food systems.

Accelerating Entrepreneurship: Campus Change Agents

By surveying and then mapping the current areas of social innovation and entrepreneurship across the four campuses and through celebrating faculty, staff and students who are the “early adopters” of social innovation at VIU, we will better understand how to prepare other faculty and staff to support the evolution of Social Innovation Hubs at VIU. This will include program development in entrepreneurial skills and business start-ups, network development, internships, mentorships, and field days.

We will also map the faculties, departments, research facilities and individual faculty members or staff people who are already engaged in food-related education (i.e. Anthropology, Geography, Education) or training (Culinary Arts, Workplace Essential Skills Training) or are food producers, processors or wild harvesters themselves (we have many) in order to infuse these ways of knowing and being into this initial project. Finally, we will map external resources across the province, include a map of Farm Schools and First Nations Food cultivation centres, and sites engaged in teaching or supporting Social Innovation through food systems transformation with First Nations communities (i.e. T’Sooke Nation) or with Persons with Developmental Disabilities (i.e. Providence Farm).

We will also accelerate expansion of VIU's internal capacity by supporting professional development of the faculty and staff at VIU, such as with courses and communities of learners, mentoring opportunities, and networks of social innovation accelerators. This includes a *Social Innovation mini conference* for faculty and staff during regular spring professional development activities.

Incubating Entrepreneurs: Student-Inspired Entrepreneurship

Expand upon existing opportunities for VIU students to engage in entrepreneurial environments, including Field Days, Internships, and embedding entrepreneurial lenses into the course content. This will include developing a Hub around the existing student-led Campus Food Movement, including invigorating the on-campus Farmers' Market and extending the work of the Healthy Communities Coordinator to develop social procurement policies and practices at VIU.

The core curriculum of the Certificate in Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship will be enhanced to target diverse populations of our student body, including First Nations students, students with developmental disabilities, English as a Second Language or immigrant students with a range of food-active community partners and organizations.

Another Social Innovation Hub will be developed with VIU's existing Workplace Essential Skills Training Program (WEST), whose staff and students are keen to develop on-going social enterprises and to encourage their students to take up new social entrepreneurial activities. The WEST program includes a training stream in food production, harvesting, preparation and retailing at the VIU Farmers Market and other venues.

Innovating Enterprises: Campus- Community partnerships

The proposed Cowichan Tribes Food Systems and Food Ways project will develop capacity to strengthen and move the "Learn and Earn" model forward. This could begin with the supplying of fresh, local food to provide for seasonally-adjusted local food menus in schools, universities, health care facilities, and community gathering places. This would result in increased local food systems efficiency and competitiveness, which could mean more stability for local food producers, gatherers, processors and food service providers.

The RECODE funding will create a place for traditional foods education and experiential learning about traditional and contemporary food systems. This can be achieved by complementing prior, existing and emerging Essential Skills programs in First Nations Food Systems and Food Ways in partnership with Cowichan Tribes, which has approx. 384 learners between 19-24 years of age who are unemployed and seeking secondary education or training. In partnership with Cowichan Tribes, curriculum could be designed for Essential Skills training in land and aquatic food production, food processing, wild harvest/ herbology, beekeeping, seed saving etc. to support food cultivation and wild harvesting practices.

This grant will allow the inclusion of teaching modules that highlight traditional and alternative economic models, including traditional trading and gifting practices and the traditional food systems and foodways of the Coast Salish peoples. This will complement the development of a Social Innovation Hub in Cowichan in partnership with the Cowichan Tribes, starting with prior, existing and emerging programs in FN Culinary Arts, Life Skills, and FN Leadership.

Opportunities for Cowichan Nation-based social enterprise/entrepreneurship involve food production, distribution, processing or the provision of food services such as:

- Band School Lunch programs: Through the Buckets on Buses program, the Culinary Arts equipment is in existence, and the new Cowichan campus Trades Centre (CTC) could house the kitchens for preparation (shared with VIU, Cowichan Tribes and School District) and distribution to Cowichan Tribes students throughout district schools and at VIU Cowichan.
- Elders Luncheon: A long-standing tradition is the weekly Elders luncheons. Enterprises could be developed to provide local food for the lunches and also in engaging the Elders in teaching about traditional food systems and food ways.
- Kowutzen Cultural Center - hosts numerous conferences and houses the River Walk café.
- Blue Box food program for on reserve and off reserve members of Tribes; Meals on Wheels; Hospital foods for aboriginal people; Local food procurement for the new Cowichan hospital and for the new Tribes-built long term care facility.
- Provide traditional and contemporary foods to the 4 traditional Longhouse kitchens in the Cowichan territory where numerous Coast Salish Winter Dances, community gatherings and ceremonies are held.

This RECODE project will conclude with a *Social Innovation Showcase* or other celebration of the entrepreneurial spirit at VIU.

How do they align with existing initiatives on campus ?

We have a strong record of undergraduate achievement, a history of community engagement and engagement with FN groups in the Coastal region at VIU.

VIU has an unique relationship with First Nations in the Islands and Coastal regions where we serve over 18,800 students, VIU has the largest number of Aboriginal students of any university in the province, constituting 10% of the student population. We already engage in social innovation activities with Coastal First Nations such as our recent delivery of specialized Event Management Certificate to the Heiltsuk Nation who are hosting the annual canoe gathering known as Tribal Journeys from July 13 – 19, 2014 in Bella Bella, which will involve 3000 plus guests and 50 to 60 canoes.

VIU's Cowichan campus is located in the traditional territory of the Cowichan Tribes, and hosts an Aboriginal student population of 30%. Cowichan Tribes is the largest single First Nations Band in BC, with over 4400 members. Like many First Nations in the country, their population is young: it has grown 30% in last 5 years, so that more than 50% of the bands' members are under 25 years of age. Cowichan Tribes has more than 600 employees and is one of the largest single employers in the district.

- Cowichan Tribes and VIU have collaboratively developed and delivered training for Aboriginal learners, including: employability/vocational training, adult upgrading, University and College Entrance Preparation (UCEP), First Nations Building Inspector, Early Childhood Education and Care, Microsoft Office Skills Training, and many short term courses focussed on specific community training needs.
- Recently-completed external Community Engagement exercise on "Understanding the Village" with Social Planning Cowichan, Cowichan Elders and numerous other partners.

Completed Knowledge Synthesis Report for SSHRC "Traditional Craft Trades as Employers and Training Mechanisms for Canadian Youth" Dec. 2013. World Leisure Centre of Excellence at Vancouver Island University in collaboration with the Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique.

- CCAAFSS is working with the Center for Co-op and Community-based Economies, University of Victoria, and the Cowichan Coop Commons to identify and invigorate social enterprise and entrepreneurial activities in the Cowichan region.
- The Campus Food Movement began as part of a national pilot project, funded by Meal Exchange and the Sierra Youth Coalition. The Healthy Communities Coordinator position arose from the Campus Food Movement and was established by VIU in response to student's desire for curriculum and community-based research around food systems transformation.
- Health and Human Services faculty supports the Centre for Healthy Aging (Parksville) and the Outreach Centre for Family and Community Care (Nanaimo), which both are social innovation models. HHS Faculty have attended the Social Innovation Lab that was put on by the Ministry of Social Development
- VIU currently seeking a Tier II Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Community Engagement, to apply Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous research principles, protocols and methods to projects such as this.

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

To gauge the system transformation that we are seeking to stimulate, the project team will embark on a Collective Impact Assessment process at the outset of the project. Collective Impact offers a proven framework to guide the implementation of initiatives aimed at system-level transformation; this process will provide appropriate mechanisms to assess the progress, effectiveness, and impact of collective action efforts.

We are intending to foster a thriving knowledge economy by supporting the application of our teaching and research capability and the expansion of an enterprise and entrepreneurial culture amongst our students, so that the knowledge and skills of our graduates contributes to socially-responsible economic prosperity in the region and beyond. We aspire to:

- Build a campus culture where enterprise and entrepreneurship amongst students and staff is encouraged, supported and championed.
- Develop Social Economy leadership in aboriginal communities by promoting food system and foodways revitalization in order to re-connect students and community members to place and traditional teachings.
- Create social entrepreneurship opportunities within the regular pedagogical experiences on campus. We can become an innovation hub for small businesses that create a positive feedback loop to enhance VIU's food system by increasing access to socially-responsible products and businesses within an atmosphere of student empowerment and consciousness.
- Work with youth-at-risk or retirees to create entrepreneurial activities that have the benefit of developing skills, fulfilling social needs, and creating broader community connections and societal change.
- Create second-order change within the institutional, community and Tribes culture.