

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.

Wilfrid Laurier University

Wilfrid Laurier University is embracing the opportunity to inspire a new generation of student social innovators and social entrepreneurs through its commitment to SI+SE.

Social entrepreneurs and innovators tackle pervasive economic, social, environmental and political challenges in ways that disrupt systems and cross conventional boundaries. The Laurier approach to SI+SE grows out of an institutional culture that emphasizes socially aware and mobilized students; deep community engagement; high levels of inter-disciplinary collaboration; committed leadership and dedicated resources; and access to the wisdom and experience of external practitioners.

SI+SE at Laurier is thriving within an ecology of existing course offerings in social entrepreneurship and innovation, incubators, student enterprises and community partnerships across all academic disciplines. Each of our campuses is making a unique contribution to SI+SE by bringing together student and faculty interests with local community priorities.

Our highly regarded School of Business and Economics, for example, empowers students to develop social enterprises from concept to completion, while our Launchpad incubators gives social entrepreneurs access to mentorship, resources and peer feedback. Our Social Entrepreneurship Option—which uniquely combines local and international experiential learning—resides in the Faculty of Arts but welcomes students from all disciplines. Our Brantford campus and Faculty of Social Work address pressing local concerns using principles of social innovation while a researcher in the Faculty of Education—with BlackBerry's® support—has launched a digital mentoring project in partnership with Haitian educators. This inclusive approach to varied elaborations of SI+SE aligns with Laurier's commitment to diversity in a multi-campus, multi-community university and equips us with the broad range of competencies necessary to help our students address the complex challenges of our time.

The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation's determination to encourage social innovation zones and create a national network of thought leaders aligns with Laurier's ambition to deepen its commitment to SI+SE with a comprehensive suite of co-curricular activities and social innovation spaces. Laurier is also enthusiastic about the distinctive contribution it can make to a national conversation about SI+SE and is eager to learn from the varied approaches and experiences of others as the adaptive capacity of the network evolves.

SI+SE: Laurier's Mission in Action

Laurier prides itself on its engagement in deeply symbiotic and mutually enriching relationships with multiple communities. Over its hundred-year history, it has evolved from a small denominational institution to a comprehensive university with campuses in Waterloo, Brantford, Kitchener, Toronto and Chongqing, China. In Kitchener-Waterloo, we offer programs in Arts, Business and Economics, Education, Music, Science and Social Work. The Brantford campus hosts faculties of Liberal Arts, and Human and Social Sciences, as well as social work and business programs, and has been integral to the unique revitalization of that community's downtown. With strong community support, we are currently seeking government approval to develop a mid-sized campus in Milton, which will feature its own areas of academic specialization.

In all of these locations, Laurier’s determination to “inspire lives of leadership and purpose” is manifest. Laurier is a national leader in experiential learning, co-curricular activities, the student experience, business co-op education, professional practica and multi-campus governance. It was also one of ten campuses to receive support from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation in 2007 to launch its Community Service-Learning Program. That grant helped Laurier establish a program that continues to foster new pedagogies and strong connections with the community. Over 1,500 students enrolled in service-learning courses in 2012/13 alone.

Our commitment to SI+SE entwines two well-established strands of our institutional DNA, combining the entrepreneurial spirit of our business school with a deep institutional commitment to social action and community engagement. For Laurier, SI+SE is not a radical departure but a natural evolution.

SI+SE: Progress to Date

Driven by faculty and student interest and by external partnerships, both local and global, activities in the SI+SE sphere have been springing up in various disciplines, departments and campuses across the university for several years. As a result, Laurier can point to substantial achievement in areas where the RECODE Transformation grant is seeking advanced levels of activity.

- **Courses and Labs**

- Laurier’s Social Entrepreneurship Option (SEO)—the first of its kind in Canada—is open to all students at the Waterloo campus and is situated in the Faculty of Arts. A new faculty position has been created in social entrepreneurship to lead this initiative. A similar program is under consideration in Brantford. The program offers seven courses, which include local community engagement and an international experience. SEO has garnered interest for its radical paradigm, innovative pedagogy and emphasis on local and global action. SEO students will be leaders in SI+SE activities as mentors and leaders, and the program will serve as a model for other universities seeking to strengthen links between arts and SI+SE.
- Entrepreneurship courses offered across the faculties through the Schlegel Centre for Entrepreneurship are generating an increasing number of social enterprises in response to student interest. Courses include “introduction to entrepreneurship” and a follow-up “hands-on” idea-to-innovation course at the LaunchPad.
- The Community Engagement Option provides opportunities for social innovation in the Kitchener downtown. It operates in conjunction with one of our closest community partners, The Working Centre, a non-profit organization that provides individuals and groups access to tools and opportunities to engage in building community projects.
- Community Service-Learning in Brantford and Waterloo has led to mutually beneficial partnerships with long-term community partners, including St. Leonard’s Community Services.
- Multiple local and international initiatives apply principles of social innovation across a wide range of Laurier faculties and departments, from community music programs in Kitchener-Waterloo to a digital mentoring project with educators in Haiti and deepening engagement with universities in Ghana.

- **Incubators**
 - Laurier Launchpad, located at the Hub in downtown Kitchener, reports that one-third of all new enterprises exhibit characteristics of social innovation. The first enterprise ever launched was the Smile Epidemic, which employs behavioural science to encourage grassroots expressions of positive reinforcement. Now, as Plasticity Labs, it works to re-shape workplace culture around models of affirmation.
 - LaunchPad Brantford focuses on serving students and the local community, with a particular emphasis on engaging Aboriginal youth and youth facing multiple barriers.
 - Laurier partner Communitech—a regional hub for commercialization of innovative technologies—offers the ASCent (Accelerating Social Cause Entrepreneurs) program to help young social entrepreneurs get their ideas off the ground.
 - BizU—offered in partnership with Lutherwood and the YMCA—enlists Laurier students from various faculties to mentor youth facing multiple barriers as they create businesses, both profit and not-for-profit.
- **Partnerships**
 - Laurier has strong community, educational and industry partnerships in Waterloo, Kitchener, Brantford and internationally (see Index 2).
 - The Social Innovation Research Group (SIRG) in the Faculty of Social Work participates in social entrepreneurship projects with organizations serving Aboriginal youth, newcomer women and women living in shelters.
 - The Centre for Community Research Learning and Action (CCRLA) is partnering with the Laurier Students’ Public Interest Research Group (LSPIRG) and SIRG to engage students in research to address critical needs in the Kitchener-Waterloo community. Students work closely with a faculty supervisor/mentor and community organizations and present their results at a knowledge mobilization conference hosted locally with community partners.
 - A partnership with Ashoka Canada is being actively pursued.
- **Seed Funding**
 - The Laurier Start-up Fund, currently at \$1.5M and growing, allows emerging social enterprises to compete for early investor funding.
- **Student Engagement**
 - A student club – The Social Innovation Project – has been successfully launched on the Waterloo campus by students in Arts and Business & Economics.
 - Brantford students have a history of involvement in social enterprise. Student leadership there participated in developing this letter of interest and will formalize student engagement under the SI+SE banner.

SI+SE: Laurier’s Vision

In order to broaden the conversation about social innovation and entrepreneurship, and to begin creating an institution-wide approach, the VP Academic & Provost, Dr. Deborah MacLatchy, convened an Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada sponsored conference in November 2013. The Inspired Change Summit: Innovation in University-Community Enterprises brought together students and faculty from all disciplines, alumni and community members to discuss social innovation. As a result of that catalyzing event, Laurier signed on to participate in AshokaU’s 360° assessment process, the first step in achieving the Changemaker Campus designation.

Now, Laurier is poised to broaden the range of its curricular and co-curricular initiatives in SI+SE. In particular, we intend to create physical spaces, resources and structures that will permit SI+SE to

flourish at our Waterloo, Kitchener and Brantford campuses. This will occur within a model that combines academic initiatives with student-driven co-curricular activities that engage with Laurier's communities. Under the RECODE banner and with matching funds from government, other donors and institutional budgets, Laurier will launch the following three-year program to advance its current commitment to SI+SE:

1. Create Spaces Where SI+SE Can Occur

Enlarging upon the successful Launchpad models in Kitchener and Brantford, we will design social innovation zones to allow students, community members, social entrepreneurs, alumni and staff facilitators to connect and collaborate on our Waterloo and Brantford campuses, animated by the activities and resources outlined below.

2. Provide Mentorship and Student Support

Fostering a ubiquitous culture of SI+SE requires creative, well-connected and student-centred staff in both Brantford and Waterloo and an experienced, inspirational director. Staff will oversee development of SI+SE across the university and cultivate connections with students, community organizations, social entrepreneurs, industry partners, government and faculty.

3. Support Student-Centred SI+SE Collectives

Providing a fund at each campus to which student organizations, including students working with community partners, could apply would enable students to organize guest speakers and TED-type talks; student conferences and travel; displays and campus-wide events and other outreach activities.

4. Learn + Connect + Consult

An SI+SE steering committee made up of community members, social entrepreneurs and alumni, and students, faculty and staff from all campuses will provide high-level oversight of SI+SE developments and opportunities.

5. Seed New SI+SE

Laurier will establish a fund to provide seed money to support innovative and viable student-generated initiatives.

6. Research Outcomes and Participate in the RECODE National Network

As part of RECODE's national network of thought leaders, Laurier will establish metrics and gather data around SI+SE and, in cooperation with other SI+SE participants, work to establish best practices and devise innovative means for sharing those practices.