

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.

Concordia University

VISION

Concordia University is committed to offering its students a next-generation education. It wants them to be challenged and thrive in a forward-looking environment. RECODE Concordia aims to provide students with the key skills and competencies associated with social innovation and social entrepreneurship (SI/SE), namely problem identification, social and marketplace analysis, solution design and prototyping, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and enterprise creation. Working in close partnership with Québec's leading consortia in SI/SE, RECODE Concordia has the potential to maximize engagement, mobilization, and training of large numbers of students at all levels, who will contribute in transformational ways to the development of Québec and Canada's network of social innovation and entrepreneurship. RECODE Concordia will offer a unique environment, with access to the best academic and practitioner expertise in both English and French, for collaboration among students in universities across Québec.

This proposal addresses all six objectives of the RECODE program and the Transformation Fund will allow us to scale, diversify and expand the reach and impact of Concordia's innovative programs and activities, and those of our partners. We will do this by developing:

INCUBATION CAPACITY: by building on our proven success and that of our partners in providing SI/SE with specialized spaces, business intelligence, access to the entrepreneurial ecosystem and funding channels, we will create a scalable ***social innovation zone***. This zone will foster collaboration across Montréal's and Québec's higher education and community-based SI/SE, expanding Québec's international leadership in social economy theory, policy and practice, and community economic development;

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION AND EXPERIMENTATION: by expanding a wide range of opportunities across campus for student involvement in SI/SE; testing alternative curriculum models for credited student learning that are particularly suited to project-based and community partnership-oriented student learning experiences; and developing a campus-wide culture of inquiry and engagement with social innovation and entrepreneurship through activity-based workshops and projects that capitalize on existing institutional and student-led initiatives; and

A **KNOWLEDGE COMMONS**, where experiential knowledge of our multi-sectoral partners will complement fundamental and applied academic knowledge. This commons is envisioned as an open learning space, both physical and virtual, accessible to everyone.

Concordia's Academic Plan 2012-2016 identifies experiential learning and community engagement as priorities of the university's academic mission because they allow faculty and students to test knowledge against experience and to develop skills and expertise to put to use for the benefit of society. Our longstanding commitment to engaged learning recognizes that real-world knowledge and experience enhance university education, heighten student engagement, motivation and success.

RECODE Concordia will expand an array of student-focused initiatives into a comprehensive suite of learning opportunities for budding entrepreneurs interested in launching an innovative venture that addresses a social issue (for profit and not-for profit), or in seeking new solutions to complex social challenges. ***Social entrepreneurs and social innovation fellows*** from all disciplines will benefit from direct training, mentorship, and field experience. They will have access to socially engaged scholars and researchers, community practitioners, and a vast network of social economy experts and entrepreneurs. Participants will also benefit from SI/SE driven certificate and degree programs, project-based programming, internships and stand-alone credit courses. Equally important, they will be eligible to receive seed funding and start-up capital, and will have the freedom to move between all participating incubator sites.

KEY ACTIVITIES AND ALIGNMENT WITH EXISTING INITIATIVES

INCUBATION CAPACITY

RECODE Concordia will create a vibrant zone where students, seeking to develop social innovation and social entrepreneurship initiatives, will be fully supported throughout all phases of project development. Central to the success of this zone are three existing high-performing incubators that will help students congregate, discuss and design their projects in partnership with the university and the community. Each incubator has a demonstrated record of success and impact in distinctive areas of activity, and their complementarity will be truly unique in terms of bringing value to the SI/SE ecosystem. Working in tandem and independently, these incubators are equipped to provide invaluable support and services to social enterprise start-ups and pre-start-ups. Not only will student participants directly confront the opportunities and challenges of developing SI/SE initiatives, their engagement and experience will also greatly expand and deepen their capacity as future leaders of society.

o District 3 Innovation Centre (D3)

D3 is an innovation ecosystem located at Concordia University's downtown Montréal campus. Established in January 2013, its mission is to enable the transformation of ideas into innovative new products that are engineered, designed and marketed to compete with the best. In the spring 2014, D3 entered the second phase of its development and began expanding to create an SI/SE platform. One of the distinctive features of D3 is the hands-on involvement of alumni mentors and entrepreneurs-in-residence who accompany student teams through all phases of project development, innovation and entrepreneurship. As part of its second phase of development, D3 will engage a ***social entrepreneur-in-residence*** to mentor students as well as SE start-ups across Montréal, providing student teams with a unique learning experience.

• Incubateur universitaire d'innovation sociale (IUIS)

Based at l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) at the *Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales* (CRISES: see Multi-Sectoral Innovation Zone), this incubator focuses on developing tools that enable and empower communities to address pressing social and economic issues and concerns. One such example is the creation of shared knowledge stations (*ateliers de savoirs partagés*) where researchers and community leaders collaborate to design potential models of local development.

- ***Incubateur universitaire Parole d'excluEs (IUPE)***

A non-profit, grass-roots organization dedicated to end exclusion in all its forms, *Parole d'excluEs* strives to ensure the free exercise of individual rights and preserve the dignity of marginal populations. The mission of this university incubator is to encourage the mobilization of citizens by providing a space where knowledge and practice intersect. Students, faculty, and citizens participate in an ongoing process to design transformative strategies on site in communities and within UQAM.

Novel and effective mechanisms will be established to connect and cross-fertilize incubation and curriculum, which are the two major avenues enabling student engagement with SI/SE.

- o **Student Engagement**

Concordia's dynamic student groups provide ready-made pathways into the social economy, opening up new opportunities to incubate social innovation and entrepreneurship. To leverage the power of student experience, knowledge, and networks RECODE Concordia will create ***social innovation fellows***, students with a proven track record in SI/SE. Selected by a committee representing Concordia and its partners, ***social innovation fellows*** will serve as campus ambassadors by promoting co-curricular activities and working with faculty to develop novel curriculum-based incubation initiatives. Their engagement will benefit from mentoring by faculty, partner organizations as well as the Concordia offices of the Dean of Students and Community Engagement, both of which will contribute invaluable professional community experience to RECODE Concordia.

- o **Faculty Engagement**

RECODE will inspire and facilitate new types of engagement by faculty (with community partners, with each other, with students) to generate richer, more innovative, SI/SE informed curriculum development. Students' experiential learning in incubators and with partners will be recognized by the academy and will, in turn, inform curriculum development. A Curriculum Committee (see Governance) consisting of SI/SE partners, students, and faculty will be established to foster new approaches to curriculum development.

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION AND EXPERIMENTATION

Fueled by the disruptive impact of new information technologies and learning platforms, changing student expectations about university, and concerns about graduates' employability, there is a surge of experimentation with new educational models. In addition to pursuing online delivery of conventional courses and programs, universities are developing more modular curricula, deploying new methods for crediting prior and informal learning through competency-based credentials, and creating new, zone-based opportunities for students to pursue entrepreneurship and self-directed learning.

In light of these developments, and with both short- and longer-term horizons in mind, RECODE Concordia focuses on creating new, additional pathways for student involvement in SI/SE activities that will simultaneously build out incubation capacity. Concordia's School of Community and Public Affairs (SCPA) offers an existing model of an academic unit with a successful history of community-based curriculum including internships, modular courses and recruitment of instructors representing community organizations, government and the private sector. Its

bilingual graduate diploma in Community Economic Development integrates experiential and theoretical approaches.

One major focus of our efforts will be to broaden student engagement and pilot new learning models by creating visible pathways into SI/SE activities and incubator spaces from within Concordia's existing credit-bearing curriculum. These efforts, many of which are already underway, will involve the creation of:

- a new, stand-alone SI/SE elective course, undergraduate minor, and graduate certificate (the latter two are already in progress) – see * in diagram;
- an SI/SE-oriented, project driven course cluster for non-CEGEP students during their first year as a coherent way to fulfill their additional credit requirements (already in early planning stages);
- a faculty community of practice around SI/SE opportunities for students (curriculum innovation fund to support this is already in place);
- a project-based master's degree track to sit alongside existing course- and thesis-based master's degree options;
- cross-disciplinary “project teams” undertaken with faculty supervision, with the possibility of creating “independent study” and collective learning opportunities.

In addition to these initiatives, RECODE Concordia will also devise and pilot an alternative, for-credit model oriented around an SI/SE project that is co-designed with community partners. Although discussions of possible models are still in early stages, one inspiration is the *Tiimiakatemia*, or Team Academy, a model originating at the JAMK (*Jyväskylä*) University of Applied Sciences in Finland. In this model, highly student- directed learning teams operate as independent cooperative companies. Students are required to conduct real-life projects, which they have to develop and fully fund themselves. Projects function both as learning environments (for studies and developing the individual's competence) and as ways of doing business (for team companies). This is a successful training ground as *Tiimiakatemia* reports that 42% of graduates have started their own company by the third year of graduation. This approach, which emphasizes student enterprise as a rich context for learning, resembles the highly successful zone model at places like Ryerson University. However, the important difference is that the activity is credit-based in Finland, which would also be the objective at Concordia. Such projects could be based in participating incubators where student participants will benefit from practitioner mentorship, training, and other resources provided by the RECODE Concordia partner network. This type of experimental student-led initiative, guided by a joint academic-practitioner team, will disrupt typical practitioner-academic-student relations with the potential for fostering new directions in curriculum development.

Complementing these curriculum initiatives RECODE will also make more visible and aggregate a number of highly successful **co-curricular activities** that introduce students to the work of SI/SE. For example, D3 and the Office of Community Engagement currently sponsor events, design jams and competitions that place students in unique team-building contexts. Similarly targeted workshops on entrepreneurship, business development and networking are offered through GradProSkills, our nationally recognized professional skills development program for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

KNOWLEDGE COMMONS

Community engagement is a major thrust of research activity at Concordia. As emphasized in our Strategic Research Plan, which describes established and emerging strengths in fundamental, applied and participatory action research, Concordia is generating foundational knowledge, nurturing discoveries, fostering innovation and making evidence-based contributions that respond to the needs of society. This includes the growing imperatives of adaptability and sustainability as experienced by people, communities, markets, industries, and institutions. Additionally, many of the research strengths of Concordia—in community economic development, cultural and creative industries, urban transportation, energy conservation, aging, preventive health, aboriginal youth, and gender-based discrimination—have enormous potential to mobilize student engagement and generate SI/SE projects.

Universities are important spaces to foster dialogue, advocacy and movement building. What is changing at Concordia, UQAM and elsewhere is the capacity of students to launch social enterprises in fields such as food and housing, sustainability, and environmental protection. Concordia students are involved through the Concordia Greenhouse, a community student learning space designed around environmental sustainability and urban agriculture. They and other Montréal area students have also been active in *Justice alimentaire Montréal* (JAM), a collaborative network dedicated to promote urban agriculture.

Engineers without Borders (EWB) helps students develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills to cultivate projects that maximize social, economic and environmental benefit. Recently, EWB's national organization moved decisively into the area of social innovation with the initiation of their Pivot Fellowship program, which encourages students to develop new social entrepreneurship initiatives or to improve social impact and sustainability of existing organizations. Through its Raymer-Wygodny Global Engineering Initiative, Concordia's Centre for Engineering in Society (CES) is helping to build the web presence of EWB's social innovation work. Concordia's award-winning EWB is therefore uniquely positioned to contribute expertise and effort to projects within the RECODE mandate.

Similarly, UQAM students have been involved in setting up UTILE (*Unité de travail pour l'implantation de logement étudiant*). A non-profit student organization, its mission is to promote and develop new, affordable and self-financed student housing models. Just like its Concordia counterparts, UTILE is a young and innovative organization that could greatly benefit from the support of an expanded social entrepreneur and innovation ecosystem.

The opportunities provided by the RECODE program will allow greater access to the entrepreneurial skills, tools and expertise of D3 and the many stakeholders of SI/SE. The *Chantier de l'économie sociale* (*Chantier*: see Multi-Sectoral Social Innovation Zone) also has a very active youth movement representing young people throughout Québec inspired by the social economy. They, as well as Concordia and UQAM and other students, bring energy, commitment and passion to RECODE Concordia.

MULTI-SECTORAL SOCIAL INNOVATION ZONE: PARTNERSHIPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A defining feature of RECODE Concordia is a vast network of high-performing, multi-sectoral partnerships comprising leading institutions, clusters, and community-based social innovation zones rooted in Québec and networked across Canada. These confirmed partnerships are integral

to realizing the scale-up potential of RECODE Concordia and, as explained below, will enable student mobility across Québec's social innovation ecosystem, as well as access to professional support, mentorship, unique services and resources to catalyze social entrepreneurship:

- ***Territoires innovants en économie sociale et solidaire (TIESS)***

Funded through the *Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, de la Recherche et de la Science* (MESRS), TIESS is an organization whose mission is to facilitate the transfer of innovations in the social and solidarity economy with the aim of fostering territorial development in Québec. TIESS brings to RECODE Concordia connections with the entire *Université du Québec* network, as well as with many CEGEPs involved in social innovation and social and solidarity economy and over 30 organizations across Québec engaged in local development and transformation. These include established and new social movements and urban and rural intermediaries. In addition to facilitating networking opportunities, TIESS will provide knowledge transfer and mobilization resources for students at the District 3 Innovation Centre as well as in community-based sites across the province.

- ***Chantier de l'économie sociale (Chantier)***

A non-profit corporation, the *Chantier* brings together sectoral networks of the social economy, social movements and economic development intermediaries from all regions of Québec that work in support of solidarity and social enterprise. Its mission is to promote the social economy as an integral part of Québec's plural economy and, in doing so, to participate in the democratisation of the economy and the emergence of a new development model based on values of solidarity, equity and transparency. The *Chantier's* role in RECODE Concordia will be to facilitate networking with social economy actors, provide social economy training and internships for students, and contribute to identify relevant expertise to help develop projects, on and off-campus. For example, the *Chantier's* expertise in social finance will be crucial in enabling budding entrepreneurs to better understand the evolving impact investing landscape in Québec and Canada, and increase their capacity to access start-up funding for SI/SE initiatives. Furthermore, RECODE Concordia will profit here from the ties that the *Chantier* has built with the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet).

The *Chantier* and TIESS will also provide our students, faculty and community partners with a window to the world. The *Chantier* brings with it a strong international dimension with links to international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Labour Organization, and more recently the European Commission and the United Nations. The *Chantier* is also part of the *Réseau international de promotion de l'économie sociale et solidaire* (RIPESS), an international network of social and solidarity organizations that is also in dialogue with the international organizations mentioned above. This will truly open up exciting possibilities to students and practitioners who participate in RECODE Concordia.

- ***Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales (CRISES)***

An interuniversity and multidisciplinary research centre, CRISES brings together about sixty researchers from all over Québec and numerous graduate students. CRISES members study and analyze innovation and social change from a variety of disciplines: anthropology, geography, history, mathematics, philosophy, industrial relations,

management science, economics, political science, sociology, and social work. In the course of RECODE Concordia, CRISES will facilitate access for students to the social innovation incubator it set up in 2011 as well as build the capacity of this incubator to serve its objectives (see Incubation Capacity for further details).

- ***L'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)***

Our major university partner has been involved since its foundation in 1969 in rethinking engagement and social responsibility. The main hub of RECODE activities at UQAM will be situated at its community service unit (*Services aux collectivités*) which promotes and coordinates training and research activities in collaboration with community organizations, women's groups and labour unions. SAC brings to RECODE Concordia a long history of co-construction of knowledge with the community, critical to implementing collaborative, sustainable relationships outside the university.