

*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.*

# **Emily Carr University of Art + Design**

## **Creative Research for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

### **WHAT ARE YOUR INITIAL ASPIRATIONS AND VISION FOR HOW SOCIAL INNOVATION CAN TAKE ROOT AND GROW AT YOUR INSTITUTION, AND CONTRIBUTE TO BROADER CHANGE?**

Emily Carr University of Art + Design was established in 1925, and is the leading centre for art, media and design education and research in Western Canada. Our Provincial mandate recognizes our leadership in the creative and cultural sectors of British Columbia and articulates internationalization, cultural and economic development, and public outreach as areas of central strategic importance for the University.

Emily Carr is at an extraordinarily dynamic and transformative moment in its institutional history. With the rise of digital technologies and new methods of fabrication and communication, our core disciplines have entered a period of tremendous upheaval and change. At the same time, the traditional organization of post-secondary education is being challenged by forces of globalization, increased concerns over the cost of education and job preparedness, increased demands for access, new methods of educational delivery, and new entrants into educational markets. In the midst of these changes in the external environment, Emily Carr has embarked on a process of rebuilding the contemporary art and design university—both organizationally and physically—as an adaptive and engaged site for social, cultural, and economic creativity. This process will culminate in the move of all of our operations to a new campus at the Great Northern Way site in the centre of Vancouver in the fall of 2017.

Our vision for our new campus, for the continuous redesign of our academic programs, and for our relationships to the local, regional, national and international communities that we serve, is deeply connected to the understanding that art and design institutions can play a uniquely powerful and catalytic role in the development of larger social innovation ecologies. We will be moving to an area of Vancouver that is among the last remaining tracts of undeveloped land in the City. We will be located adjacent to the Centre for Digital Media—a joint program of the four Vancouver Universities (UBC, SFU, Emily Carr, and BCIT)—and we will be part of a new creative cultural and economic district that will include digital media industries, academic programs, established and emerging business incubators, galleries and artist run centres, maker spaces, etc., as well as connections to surrounding urban residential communities, some of which are already defined, and some of which will be part of this process of urban development. It is in this context, working with the City, the Province, our institutional and industry partners, and the many stakeholders in and around the Great Northern Way trust, that we have the opportunity to establish Emily Carr University of Art + Design as a living lab for the development of a social innovation zone in the False Creek Flats neighbourhood adjacent to the Main Street corridor of Vancouver.

While this project is in part about the transformation of Emily Carr as a world class leader and innovator in art and design education, our vision is of a “social innovation zone” that extends

well beyond the buildings and traditional boundaries of our own institution, and refers instead to this larger urban ecology we are seeking to create across a number of organizations, institutions, and communities in Vancouver.

We define social innovation as a broadly relevant, multi-partnered field of cultural and economic practice that works across and within disciplines and different areas of expertise, to achieve durable and scalable change (organizational, civic, political, aesthetic, economic or structural). We see social innovation as deeply related to the creative problem solving approaches developed and studied at art and design institutions, and we believe that studio-based pedagogy and research methodologies have unique contributions to make to the understanding and practice of social innovation initiatives.

We have been working for a generation to put in place the infrastructure, programs, relationships, and building blocks for this initiative. While the support of the City and the Provincial government for our new campus is the most visible manifestation of this work, other key components include:

- The establishment of the Faculty of Culture and Community, and the creation of studio-based programs in publicly engaged art, media and design practice within the academic core.
- The implementation of participatory and co-creative methods in design research that integrate sustainability as a value at both undergraduate and graduate levels of learning
- The establishment of an internationally visible cluster of social innovation-oriented research centres in Health Design (the Health Design Lab), Stereoscopic 3D Cinema (Intersections Digital Studios), Social and Technological Innovation (the Social + Interactive Media Centre), and Materials, Fabrication, and Sustainability (the Material Matters Research Group).
- The development of a mature industry- and community-based partnered studio model that provides a platform for integrating projects and briefs derived from external partners directly into the curricular experience of our students.
- The creation of a deep and broad network of working partnerships—both within the City and Province and nationally and internationally—around our emergent vision of Emily Carr as a site for education and research that is publicly engaged, participatory, impactful, and relevant to the current and future economy.
- The broadening of our academic vision to include non-degree and short duration programming as part, of our students’ lifelong learning, and to understand the “sites” of education as manifold and distributed throughout students’ lives, and not solely about the time they spend physically at our campus.
- The establishment of a University-wide planning and development process that is broadly-based (including students, staff, faculty, and community stakeholders), visionary, and pragmatic, with the goal of maximizing our potential for positive institutional transformation through the opportunities created by the new campus development and the move to this new area of the City.

In sum, our vision of “how social innovation can take root and grow at Emily Carr and contribute to broader change” is that the values, creativity and levels of complex engagement required for this initiative are already deeply ingrained in the institution and a good deal of the

organizational infrastructure has been built. At this juncture, we are seeking support from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation to help us draw together and catalyze these elements—some of which are directly within our control and some of which lie outside our institution—as we work to establish Emily Carr as a hub and a creative engine within this new cultural and economic zone in the City of Vancouver. The ability to leverage highly developed creative processes in the service of social innovation is at the centre of our research and educational practice, and we believe that Emily Carr is ideally positioned to play a leadership role in Vancouver and in a national network and a national discourse on social innovation.

**WHAT ARE YOUR INITIAL ASPIRATIONS AND VISION FOR HOW SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP CAN TAKE ROOT AND GROW AT YOUR INSTITUTION, AND CONTRIBUTE TO BROADER CHANGE?**

Social entrepreneurship in an art and design university foregrounds creativity as a tool to understand, articulate and sustain social value in the organizations and communities in which we live and work. We recognize that the needs and expectations of our students are changing, and that the traditional distinction between an education that is either academically and creatively fulfilling or prepares students for work in a profession is giving way to approaches that address both the desire to work and the desire to work meaningfully, creatively, and adaptively.

As we understand it, the development of a culture that engenders and supports social entrepreneurship requires the integration of a number of elements that, through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were separated in the traditional disciplinary and departmental organization of post-secondary institutions. These include, but are not limited to:

- Broad and deep understandings of social and economic formations, the differences between cultures and cultural groups, and the transformations of markets and economic and financial systems (the social dimension).
- Familiarity with emerging technologies and technical systems for making media, communicating and conducting transactions, and creating organization and capital flows (the technological dimension).
- Development of practical organizational, collaborative, and business capacities for creating and managing contemporary entrepreneurial organizations (the organizational dimension).
- Understanding how to develop and leverage broader networks that can support business development and help to achieve scale (the business dimension).
- The ability, both individually and collaboratively, to address existing issues and problems with creative process and communicative practice that leads to novel and/or innovative solutions (the creative dimension).

The core pedagogical site of art and design institutions is the studio. Studio methods are, in principle, more open to a problem-based, collaborative approach to teaching and learning, and allow us to design curricula that bring together different dimensions of social entrepreneurship around real products, projects, and services. In the past three years, Emily Carr students and faculty have worked with a range of industry and community partners, including the David Suzuki Foundation, Rogers Communications, Rayne Longboards, the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver School Board, the Doctor Peters AIDS Foundation, the Fraser Health Authority, the Downtown Vancouver and South Hill Community Business Associations, Translink, MOSAIC, PIVOT Legal Society, Food not Bombs, and BC Elections

(to name a few) in a studio-based innovation environment aimed at creating real-world products, services, and artistic and social interventions that address the core notion of building sustainable social capital.

### **Examples:**

1. *We have worked with external partners to address questions of social sustainability in the Natural Capital project. A team of faculty and students worked in partnership with the David Suzuki Foundation to produce a collaborative web-based documentary exploring the experimental re-framing of the natural ecosystem in terms of economic value. This work engaged 23 students in a partnered studio and resulted in a public education strategy, a mobile app and an exhibition at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Museum, which has 50,000 visitors annually. Follow-on research led to an additional exhibition at the Museum of Vancouver (MOV) in Spring 2014 called Rewilding Vancouver.*
2. *Another example of work in the partnered studio is Lightbeam for Firefox, a project with the Mozilla Foundation, in which a team of Emily Carr faculty and students created and implemented innovative interactive data visualizations for a Firefox add-on that shows how third party sites gain access to information as users navigate the web. This project is core to Mozilla's mandate to promote open web standards and transparency and to bring greater public awareness to issues of Internet privacy. Lightbeam received press coverage in 40 publications including Fast Company, Wired, and the Guardian, has 240,000 active users, and has been downloaded over 2 million times since its release in Fall 2013.*

Our faculty have extraordinary expertise across the social, organizational, creative, and technological dimensions identified above. Although we incorporate a number of basic business skills under the broad rubric of “professional practices,” our primary weakness—and thus our primary direction for strategic partnership—is around the integration of business principles, networking, and skills development in our curriculum.

To address this gap, Emily Carr has recently embarked on a process of strategic development aimed at positioning our unique capacity for creative social and design development within the larger business and technology innovation ecosystems in British Columbia. Our goal is to develop curriculum, research initiatives, and student-driven partnerships to complement existing accelerators, incubators, and venture firms whose early stage startups have technology and business resources but lack specific direction and mentorship in design and creative practices. This work is centered in the Social + Interactive Media (SIM) Centre, which will serve as the locus of activities and organization for the RECODE initiative at Emily Carr.

The SIM Centre works across academic, government and private sectors to connect partners and create models for social and economic innovation that are framed by cultural endeavour. The Centre investigates shifting organizational paradigms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—for example, the form of the technology accelerator—and considers how the art and design university can integrate in order to advance social and economic development. In 2013-2014 the Centre completed 15 research projects with partners including GrowLab, Microsoft Canada, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and the British Columbia Innovation Council (BCIC), and in 2014 SIM begins a 5 year project with Ayogo, the Childhood Obesity Foundation, the Health Design Lab, the Public Health Agency of Canada,

and Merck to investigate future solutions in gamification at the intersection of physical, economic and social health.

As an educational institution, our core interest is in the quality of experience and future prospects of our students. Art and design students are particularly capable of working in environments that encourage creativity and innovation. In addition, they are culturally astute, strongly oriented toward making positive social change, and highly entrepreneurial, with over 28% of our alumni working in start-ups and/or self-employed.

Our vision for the development of a culture of social entrepreneurship involves the progressive amplification of partnered relationships with the twofold aim of: 1) addressing gaps we see in our students' formal and informal experience with contemporary business culture, and 2) providing real value and experience for partners who lack access to and understanding of the central role of creative practice in the development of contemporary social enterprises.

**WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES, PRACTICES, PROGRAMS AND/OR STRUCTURES ARE YOU PROPOSING TO ACHIEVE THIS?**

Our core vision for this initiative is to extend our research and educational capacity around art- and design-led methodologies for social innovation and to build an organizational culture that supports our students' development as creative entrepreneurs.

**Extending Art- and Design-Led Methodologies for Social Innovation:** As a specialized art and design university we are leaders in human-centered design and provide artistic and design-oriented problem solving methodologies that have broad impact for markets, relationships, structures, organizations and models of social innovation. Art and design students are trained to use creativity in all aspects of problem solving, making them key members of any collaborative team focused on transformative social and organizational change. The partnered studio is a key structure for how we accomplish this: studio-based work and innovative forms of curriculum create new possibilities for how we work with partners to identify and create solutions to environmental and social problems.

**Building a Culture of Creative Entrepreneurs:** Whether through partnered research or course work, students and faculty at Emily Carr routinely create proposals, concepts, prototypes, business concepts and initiatives that range from how to increase hand-washing compliance in hospitals (Hand Hygiene for Vancouver Coastal Health Authority), developing new methods in pattern making to reduce waste in garment production (Clothing as Conversation) creating safe environments on public transit (Riders Who Read), developing packaging to reduce waste caused by disposable food containers (Sustainer) or engaging multi-family buildings to divert food scraps from the landfill (Compost Collective). Through these projects and partnerships we have demonstrated our readiness to build an explicit, intentional, and focused culture of creative entrepreneurship at Emily Carr.

We propose to focus our efforts on three areas of activity during the delivery period (Fall 2015 – Fall 2017) with the goal of catalyzing our social innovation agenda and establishing a foothold in our new location at Great Northern Way prior to our move to the new campus:

1. The creation of a new series of externally partnered studios explicitly focused on

- Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship.
2. The creation of a micro-grant program for students, faculty, and external partners to develop start-up projects in support of the Emily Carr social innovation agenda.
  3. The establishment of a storefront presence (EMBED) that will host partnered studio and project-based activities adjacent to the Great Northern Way site.

## **ACTIVITY 1: Social Innovation Studios**

As part of the RECODE initiative we want to build on our history of studio-based pedagogy and create new capacity for implementing and testing new, innovative models that work with the form of the partnered studio. We propose a series of 8 (2/semester) “Social Innovation Studios” that will be developed by teams of faculty, students, and external partners around core themes of sustainability, cultural innovation, and the new economy. These studios will draw upon our already existing models for working with external partners in an open studio context, focusing on curricular designs that address the need for business development and entrepreneurial skills.

### **Goals for Social Innovation Studios:**

- Develop research agendas that support, expand and respond to key issues facing external partners.
- Develop new models for how partnered studios can connect to external organizations in order to achieve wider public impacts in social innovation.
- Develop partnered studio models that bring together existing areas of expertise to provide a coordinated platform for promoting institutional transformation, student-led learning, and new pedagogical approaches to social innovation and entrepreneurship.

***Example:** We have created new models for working with partners in the framework of research and curriculum through a partnership with the Fraser Health Authority. In the Keeping Patients Safe Initiative, Fraser Health asked the Health Design Lab at Emily Carr to provide a fresh perspective to help uncover and design innovative, perhaps even provocative, modes of encouraging a safety culture in their hospital settings. The project included a public co-creation session with 70 participants, private co-creation sessions with all levels of hospital staff and administration, ethnographic probes at hospitals, and extensive research analysis. Solutions created included the delivery of a tablet-based App prototype, a patient briefing video, and a full communication board strategy. The Health Design Lab accomplishes this work through hybrid activity in coursework and research projects, engaging approximately 185 students a year.*

## **ACTIVITY 2: Micro-Grants for Art and Design-Led Startups**

While we are very strong in the area of design methodology and creation, as an art and design school we are challenged by a lack of expertise to support student learning in business development. To support our students as creative entrepreneurs, we need to build a bridge—or a series of bridges—between “student project” and “startup,” so that their ideas can get out into the world and find a market. To fill this gap we have chosen to pursue strategic partnerships with the private sector to support business training and mentorship. This plays to our strengths as a unique part of the local and regional innovation ecosystem, and extends our reach while conserving resources and building relationships. As part of the RECODE

initiative we will build our capacity to support art and design-led entrepreneurship through Micro-Grants and innovative partnerships with existing community networks.

We have identified two main pathways for supporting this kind of project-based and embedded learning:

**Emerging Technology Startups and Community Networks in the Social Space.**

**Emerging Technology Startups:** Startups in the technology sector are driven by disruptive technologies that generally aim to overturn power relations, reinvent markets and social relations, and aspire to systems-level change that results in a more efficient use of human, material, or environmental resources.

For example our 2014 partner companies Farm at Hand reinvents how farmers manage their fields and connects them directly to markets, Ethical Deal has a model of social currency in which consumers receive goods from local businesses in exchange for publishing product reviews, and BitLit allows the owners of physical books to automatically access and share digital versions.

Much activity in technology is happening in the private sector and is being facilitated by accelerators such as GrowLab. An example of how we are working with technology startups is our partnership with GrowLab in which 10 design researchers from Emily Carr were connected through GrowLab to their 10 early-stage companies in Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 in order to 1) develop a methodology for connecting Internet startups to design and 2) build pathways for our students into the startup community to support business learning.

**Community Networks in the Social Space:** The other pathway we have identified is through Community Networks. By this, we mean not only maintaining relationships with non-profit organizations such as the David Suzuki Foundation, but partnership with networks such as The Next Big Thing, a youth entrepreneurship initiative led by Vancouver-based social media company HootSuite, FUEL (The Future of Urbanity the Environment and our Lifestyles), a forum led by Cause+Effect that brings thought leaders together to re-consider how we live and work, THINK School of Creative Leadership, an Amsterdam-based non-profit in the innovation space which launched their first international node in Vancouver in 2014, and Institute B, a business and education incubator that focuses on benefit corporations in product design. We are partnering with these diverse organizations in ways that suit the particular structure of each, for example leading design sessions, material investigation and prototyping for the 10 companies in The Next Big Thing, and establishing a design lab to work with FUEL partners and stakeholders around collective investigations that arise from their activities. These organizations provide connection for our students, and we see the partnerships as an opportunity to support creative leadership that will impact social innovation locally and nationally.

**Goals for Micro-Grants:**

- Invest in faculty research projects and student-led startups with Micro-Grants.
- Support the development of business models in order to create space for art and design-led businesses to flourish in the moment between “student project” and “startup.”
- Create a pipeline between Emily Carr and external incubators and accelerators such

as Launch Academy so that students are supported by business expertise and top-level mentorship as they bring their projects, initiatives, services and products to market.

- Leverage our partnerships to connect work at the university to organizations that have the most impact in social innovation communities.
- Develop and disseminate best practices for building companies that have design in their DNA.
- Create exchange between profit-led and socially driven enterprises to create new exposures and interchange between sectors through the lens of the art and design university.

**Example:** Emily Carr has recently developed a partnership with Launch Academy. Launch Academy is an innovative technology incubator that hosts 70 early stage startups onsite at their Gastown offices. Like GrowLab, many of these companies are working in the frame of disruptive technology or are B corporations. We are working with Launch Academy to pioneer new ways to integrate art and design with their companies and to simultaneously build entrepreneurship at Emily Carr. Starting in late 2014, 40 students a year will work with Launch Academy product teams in intensive sessions geared toward analyzing and improving products in areas including interface and usability, user testing, user research and profiling, ideation and selection, and prototyping. At the same time, 10 student-led startups from Emily Carr will be fully supported by Micro-Grants to attend Launch Academy, where they can access Launch Academy's resources, training and mentorship in business.

### **ACTIVITY 3: EMBED Storefront at Great Northern Way**

The third principal activity of this initiative will be the creation of an EMBED (Education + Mentorship Before Every Decision) storefront presence adjacent to the future campus site at Great Northern Way, which will serve as a physical site for some of the work supported by the other two areas of activity.

EMBED will be a platform for explorations in research methodologies, creative practice, and art and design-led initiatives that have real-world impact and push the edges of post-secondary education and community-driven engagement and mentorship. Whether fostering new processes for civic engagement, creating artworks that animate the community, or developing research-driven projects that improve the lives of vulnerable community members, EMBED will create dynamic and unanticipated linkages and legacies between ECUAD and the False Creek Flats community.

The ability to originate programming and begin the work of building relationships with the community before the move of Emily Carr to its new campus allows us to bring together the activities of the Faculty of Culture and Community and the Social + Interactive Media (SIM) Centre in a new, focused way, so that we can explore the rich intersections between community programming, social practice, and entrepreneurship.

#### **Goals for EMBED:**

- Provide a physical site for innovative partnerships, curriculum development, and student and faculty research adjacent to the Great Northern Way campus.
- Create a hub for students and community members to develop formal and informal links and develop responsive projects that benefit the immediate neighbourhood.

- Provide a site for broader curricular experiment, including community taught courses and workshop and expertise sharing (on the model of artist run centres and maker spaces).

#### **HOW DO THESE ACTIVITIES ALIGN WITH EXISTING INITIATIVES ON CAMPUS?**

These activities represent practices and initiatives that are deeply connected to Emily Carr's historical strengths and current path of institutional development. The Social Innovation Studios work with a model of externally partnered teaching and research that has been in place at Emily Carr for a generation, and the new activities proposed here are a way to explicitly connect this work to our broader social innovation agenda. The Micro-Grants for Art and Design-led Startups leverage existing opportunities for creative entrepreneurship and provide coordinated cultural, technical, and financial support that will increase the impact of our work and ideas. The EMBED Storefront at Great Northern Way provides a visible physical manifestation of this work that is part of our larger, coordinated planning for the campus relocation and transformation. Moreover, these activities are interconnected and mutually supporting and are aligned with the overall strategic agenda outlined in this letter.