

*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.*

# **Memorial University of Newfoundland**

## **1. Building Resilience through Social Innovation**

*Our aspirations and vision for how social innovation can take root and grow at Memorial University, and how it can contribute to broader change*

Like many other jurisdictions, Newfoundland and Labrador is working to redefine itself in light of radical demographic, technological, economic, ecological and other changes. We believe that social innovation has the power and potential to help us navigate these challenges. We aspire to play a central role in the development of social innovation in Canada by building upon the province's history and culture as well as its commitment to community, spirit of resilience and pride of place.

We will contribute to broader change by connecting existing elements of the social innovation ecosystem, strengthening existing linkages, fostering synergies and catalyzing new activities. Nationally and internationally, our aspiration is to contribute to, and to learn from, other 'ecologies' of social innovation and social enterprise. We will enhance our partnerships with private firms, governments and non-profits and build on the strong relationships we have with such organizations as the Shorefast Foundation, Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC NL) a non-profit organization committed to strengthening and promoting the essential role that voluntary and non-profit organizations play in building healthy and prosperous communities; and Solar Ear, a social business founded in Brazil that employs people who are hearing impaired. Recently, Howard Weinstein, co-founder of Solar Ear and Ashoka Fellow, came to Memorial to speak to our students and members of the community about his social business and its transformational impact, for example.

## **2. Building a Culture of Social Entrepreneurship at Memorial and Across Newfoundland and Labrador**

*Our vision for social entrepreneurship at Memorial University and within Newfoundland and Labrador*

We believe there is movement from multiple directions toward the increased importance of social entrepreneurship. First, younger generations of society place greater value on social and environmental outcomes, which means that competitive pressures will see firms becoming not-just-for-profit seeking in order to show customers blended returns and tangible contributions to societal well-being. Second, not-for-profit organizations will experience reduced government funding and/or greater demands for accountability and so will need to apply effective business practices to their operations. Simultaneously, social enterprises represent promising solutions to the challenges of economic diversification and rural development.

At Memorial, we believe that social entrepreneurship is an important pathway for achieving social innovation. Our vision is to build a culture of social entrepreneurship throughout our campus, and in our communities. In our teaching and learning, we will build leadership capacity in our students to engage in social entrepreneurship as well as create opportunities for students to learn through and about social enterprises. In our research, we will aim to better understand social enterprises and disseminate that understanding. And in our public engagement efforts, we will work with policy makers and community partners to enable the success of social enterprises.

At present, we see a great divide between the work of the for-profit and non-profit sectors. As such, we wish to learn how to connect and combine what is effective in each sector. Business practices are wonderful tools that can help solve social issues. However, businesses presently maintain their focus on generating profits without due attention to social and environmental impacts. Conversely, the non-profit sector has a deep understanding of social issues and human impact but lacks the business skills to achieve economic sustainability. As long as these two sectors are working independently, we will not be able to see a momentum shift. Our intention is to bring business-minded methods and tools to bear on questions of social change. This shift will start with transforming business education to embed social values within its mandate.

### **3. Building a Social Innovation Zone at Memorial University**

*The types of activities, practices, programs and structures that we are proposing to achieve our vision*

To achieve our vision we are proposing to initially focus on five initiatives: (a) a Centre for Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship; (b) a graduate degree program in social enterprise; (c) a social innovation incubator; (d) expanding undergraduate co-operative education work term placements in social enterprises; and (e) growing our partnerships.

#### **A. Centre for Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship**

The proposed Centre for Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship would serve two primary functions. First, it would achieve some of our social innovation objectives by promoting teaching, research and outreach activities. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it would serve to focus, bridge, co-ordinate and connect all social innovation and social enterprise initiatives at Memorial and to connect these initiatives to our local, national and international partners. The centre would have a university-wide mandate, reach and representation. The mission of the centre would be to build and strengthen connections between and among the elements of the provincial ecosystem, including between Memorial and the community, between units within Memorial, and among organizations in the province. It would engage in the following activities:

#### **B. Graduate Degree Program in Social Enterprise**

We are proposing (and indeed have begun the work of) creating a graduate degree program in social enterprise. The mission of this program would be to develop managerial and leadership capacity to contribute to the effectiveness of existing enterprises and the successful creation of new social enterprises. Our initial concept is to create a master of

business administration in social enterprise (MBA-SE) degree with a structure that we think would be unique in the world and which would be most effective in developing leaders of social enterprises. Our first objective is to determine the needed content and structure of a graduate degree program. The MBA-SE will include an internship component to allow students to gain hands-on experience in the field of social entrepreneurship. We look forward, through our ongoing work, to achieving a level of understanding of the needs of social entrepreneurs and social enterprises so that we can build a unique and effective program.

### ***C. Social Innovation Incubator***

The proposed social innovation incubator would build upon the experience of the existing incubators at Memorial, both of which focus on technological innovation. The Genesis Centre is a campus incubation facility that assists local technology companies in the early stages of development and growth. The second incubator is Launch Pad, Canada's first student-run entrepreneurial incubation centre, which offers a supportive place for student entrepreneurs to start their businesses. Launch Pad is a project of Enactus Memorial.

Our social innovation incubator would provide a dedicated office for emerging social enterprises and other innovation initiatives. Social entrepreneurs would receive mentoring, education and training on how to develop and operate their budding organization and proponents of other forms of social innovation would receive support and guidance. The incubator would be open to students and community members alike. The Centre for Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship will also work with Memorial alumni to build a fund to support social business start-ups that will emerge from this incubator.

### ***D. Expansion of Undergraduate Co-operative Education Placements in Social Enterprises***

Memorial offers world-class co-operative education opportunities to its students. The bachelor of commerce (co-operative) degree program was the first business co-op program in Canada. Co-operative education programs are also offered in the Faculties of Engineering, Science, Kinesiology and Arts. However, few students are placed in social enterprises or in the non-profit sector and in our experience, social enterprises often do not have the resources to hire work term students. As such, the objective of this initiative will be to expand the opportunities for students to complete their work terms in social enterprises or in government or public sector roles that support social innovation. We would do this in two ways: by having professional staff work directly with social enterprises and related organizations to help them find ways to host co-op work term placements; and by dedicating Memorial fundraising expertise to creating bursaries that will subsidize the wages paid by social enterprises to work term students.

### ***E. Growing Our Partnerships***

We are eager to grow our partnerships with community organizations, private firms, governments and non-profits as we believe that social innovation in Newfoundland and Labrador will flourish through collaboration across a variety of sectors. In 2013, Memorial,

through the Office of Public Engagement, signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Shorefast Foundation “to lay the foundation for a sustained, responsive and mutually beneficial partnership.” We also are partnering with CSC NL and collaborating with the Suncor Energy Foundation to further the development of resilient communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. Together, we have begun a conversation about how to ensure that community needs are not left behind in a rapidly expanding economy.

Working with Husky Energy, the Harris Centre has also created a cultural research fund and entered into a MOU with the historic Town of Placentia to use academic research to help sustain the community for the long term. We will continue to seek such formal partnerships across all sectors and to bring organizations from divergent sectors together to find solutions to our most pressing challenges. Memorial is already a leader in community engagement through the Harris Centre and the Office of Public Engagement. We now have the opportunity to build upon these capabilities to connect thought leaders from within the university and across the province to address sustainability challenges through social innovation.

#### **4. Developing a Culture of Social Innovation**

##### *How these proposed activities align with existing initiatives at Memorial University*

The government act that created Memorial makes explicit its special obligation to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This obligation is expressed in many forms including the commitment to provide access to excellent university education and most recently, through a more explicit emphasis on community engagement. The activities that we are proposing align with the mission of the university and build on our existing strengths and initiatives. We are engaged in a number of initiatives that promote social innovation and entrepreneurship, including the following:

1. Enactus Memorial: part of an international non-profit organization that mobilizes university students to develop outreach projects that improve the quality of life and standard of living for people in need;
2. Launch Pad: a project of Enactus Memorial that offers a unique place for student entrepreneurs to start their businesses in a supportive environment;
3. The Harris Centre: assists in the responsible development of the provincial economy and society and stimulates informed discussion on important provincial issues;
4. The Office of Public Engagement: provides support to Memorial’s publicly-engaged students, faculty, staff and units and works with external partners to help make Memorial’s resources and expertise more accessible;
5. The Genesis Centre: a support network for technology-based ventures that have high-growth potential and are seeking business guidance and capital;

6. Aboriginal Resource Office: provides resources, programs and services dedicated to Aboriginal students as well as promotes and facilitates events and activities focused on promoting Aboriginal cultures at Memorial and within the province;
7. The Labrador Institute: supports projects and programs to expand the Labrador knowledge base and facilitate the educational aspirations, community resiliency and socio-cultural well-being of the people of Labrador;
8. Our strong institutional capability in co-operative education;
9. An internationally-accredited business school offering innovative courses in social entrepreneurship and sustainability; and
10. Our relationships with community stakeholders.