

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.

Pond-Deshpande Centre, University of New Brunswick

Background

The Pond-Deshpande Centre (PDC) was launched at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) in late 2011 thanks to the generous donations from UNB alumni and serial entrepreneurs: Dr. Desh and Mrs. Jaishree Deshpande, based in Boston, and Dr. Gerry Pond, based in Saint John.

The mandate of the PDC is to be a catalyst in advancing innovation and entrepreneurship within the University of New Brunswick. Two very unique features of the PDC distinguish it from other university entrepreneurship centres. First, the PDC's efforts are not limited just to the university community, but rather to the entire province of New Brunswick, and more recently, to Nova Scotia and PEI. Secondly, the PDC played a role in advancing the awareness of and developing the social innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. The PDC became the fourth centre of its kind in the world with sister centres at MIT, the Merrimack Valley Sandbox, and the Hubli Sandbox in India.

Building the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

Over the past two years, the PDC has focused on two primary areas of ecosystem development. The first area of focus is to drive awareness about social entrepreneurship since, for most, this approach and terminology are new. For generations, the social sector has been served predominantly by the charitable, non-profit model in Atlantic Canada. Funding has been derived from two streams: philanthropy and government. In thinking about solving social problems, the point of reference for most stakeholders has tended to be only this traditional model with its limited approach to providing solutions. It is an on-going challenge to engage support to help build and/or strengthen organizations that both do well financially and do social good and thus are able to maximize social impact. The second area of focus is to build infrastructure to provide the necessary tools which support emerging social entrepreneurs. New Brunswick, in particular, has seen the growth of a thriving Start-Up Community in the past seven years. The key pillars of this ecosystem have been the creation of pools of capital, access to mentorship, availability of co-working spaces, establishment of acceleration opportunities, and the promotion & celebration of entrepreneurship. These pillars primarily support traditional for-profit, market-driven, high-tech companies. However, they fall short in providing the best tools and environment for social innovators seeking to solve complex social problems with high-impact ideas. Therefore, PDC has been striving to further develop the ecosystem for those innovators who want to both do well and do good.

Our philosophy at UNB has been to prioritize the creation of opportunities for students, faculty, and the community at large to engage in problem-solving activities and in testing new ideas. This grassroots approach, rather than a top down approach, allows the greatest number of innovators to experience the process of idea validation, to participate in the start-up process, to access mentorship, and to make connections in the ecosystem. We believe that social innovators will drive the necessary institutional changes across our society simply from the activity of iterative innovation and market validation. Thus, our vision for how social innovation and entrepreneurship can flourish on our campus and across our province involves the following key elements:

- **Outreach and awareness** to build interest among the students and to lay the groundwork for an appreciation of social impact.
- **Access to world-class curriculum** in social innovation and entrepreneurship, available to all post-secondary students regardless of chosen discipline, in addition to the community at large.
- The **opportunity for experiential learning**, such as our Activator program, that pairs student teams with early-stage entrepreneurs for one academic year to evaluate ideas, build business models, and raise seed capital.
- **Access to seed capital** through a Social Innovation Fund and follow-on funding available through pools of Patient capital as well as traditional Angel capital and Venture capital.
- The **ability to connect with the right mentor** at the right time. This will be facilitated by the launch of The Mentra Collective, a new and innovative New Brunswick initiative, of which UNB is a co-owner, which will deepen the pool of available mentors, increase the quality of mentors, and create a platform to facilitate the match-making of mentors and mentees.
- The engagement of champions from all faculties to **drive inter-disciplinary opportunities** for all stakeholders.
- Strengthening our **connections with the community** through strong partnerships. Examples include community engagement projects at Renaissance College where students work in partnership with community non-profits to help address leadership challenges.

Many of these initiatives have been started at UNB, and the next natural step is to determine how to scale them for broader access and engagement. This will be the focus of our RECODE Transformation.

RECODE Transformation Proposal

The RECODE Transformation project at UNB will be focused around five pillars. The first three pillars focus on scaling and driving sustainability within three existing programs, and the last two pillars are new initiatives that will fill gaps in the Social Innovation ecosystem at UNB.

1. Student Engagement in Social Entrepreneurship

In the fall of 2012, the PDC launched the Student Ambassador Program (SAP). The primary objectives of this program were to attract post-secondary students from across the province who self-identified as change makers, and through experiential learning opportunities, to inspire them to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career opportunity. Since that time, 50 students, representing six post-secondary institutions in the province and from a wide range of disciplines, have spent a year visiting entrepreneurial ecosystems (Fredericton, Boston, Montreal and India), interacting with a wide range of entrepreneurs at all stages of business development from idea-stage to those with multi-million dollar exits. They have also engaged with traditional market-driven and with social enterprise entrepreneurs and innovators. Student Ambassadors have hosted on-campus events that have engaged more than 1000 students across the province. This year, Student Ambassadors from all post-secondary institutions collaborated to design, develop, and host the Youth Entrepreneurship Summit for Atlantic Canada, which attracted over 200 students. Through project RECODE Transformation, we intend to turn this pilot program into a world-class youth engagement platform in Atlantic Canada with the following objectives:

1. Create a strong Alumni Network for graduating Student Ambassadors so that we can retain connections, enable more peer mentoring, and develop the critical mass of youth social innovators in the region.
2. Broaden the program's reach to engage a greater number of students with social entrepreneurship experience through improving the opportunities offered through on-campus projects. This will also include engagement with community-based organizations and social enterprises, which could benefit from development of innovative solutions.
3. Infuse more quality content and experiential learning opportunities into the Youth Entrepreneurship Summit by attracting high quality social innovators from around the world to engage with students.

2. Acceleration and Incubation

The introduction of accelerators and incubators in the Start-Up ecosystem has been an invaluable addition for providing entrepreneurs with the tools they need when they need them. However, a significant shortage of these programs weakens social innovators' ability to compete to bring good ideas to the community or market place. UNB launched the first social venture accelerator in eastern Canada, B4 Change, in 2013 with the goal of incorporating all the best practices of accelerating idea to market but with a specific focus on the unique challenges and needs of social innovators. The first cohort of 7 ventures graduated on May 28, 2014, making waves in the community in a way that has never happened before, bringing about the possibility of a new economic model for prosperity in our region. Thought leaders in the community now understand not only the possibility of creating ventures that do both well and good but also the potential for economic impact of these organizations. As with the SAP program, as part of RECODE Transformation, we wish to build B4 Change to a caliber that will attract outside investment to fund it in perpetuity.

Focus areas for growth and scale:

- Drive awareness of the accelerator across the university community and the province to deepen the pool of applicants.
- Transform the model from single cohort to a more customized, on-going experience for the emerging social entrepreneur more inline with the Ryerson Futures model.
- Attract high quality social innovators, mentors, investors and other key stakeholders into the region so that Atlantic Canadian social entrepreneurs can leverage the global social innovation ecosystem.
- Strengthen the quality of the accelerator's content to ensure participants get the right tools at the right time to drive them to solution implementation.
- Provide access to existing co-working spaces such as Planet Hatch in Fredericton and the Social Enterprise Hub in Saint John for students to work, connect and collaborate with other entrepreneurs.
- Become sponsorship-ready so that we can find private sector partners that will help us grow and sustain this program in the long term.

3. Access to pools of social capital

In order to drive the growth of grassroots idea testing across the UNB ecosystem and beyond, social innovators need to access pools of capital at all stages of their start-up journey. Accessing capital for social mission driven ventures is very difficult in this region. Most government and angel investor initiatives, as with other elements of the start-up ecosystem, are focused on high growth, high profit

potential IT companies. In 2012, UNB launched its first pool of social capital, the Social Innovation Fund, administered by the PDC. Grants ranging from \$500 to \$25,000 are available for early-stage social entrepreneurs. A selection committee meets twice annually to determine successful candidates and a total of \$100,000 per year is distributed among 12-15 new social venture ideas.

Through RECODE, we intend to:

1. Deepen the pool of applicants by increasing awareness of the availability of the funds.
2. Create experiential learning opportunities through Social Entrepreneur Launch Pads (bootcamps) to increase the quality and number of incoming social innovators.
3. Design and execute a campaign to solicit external funding to create a lasting Social Innovation Fund that will grow in perpetuity.
4. Lobby and advocate for the growth of additional pools of social capital in the region for follow-on investments in social ventures.

4. Access to world class curriculum and research opportunities

One of the great outcomes of the evolution of the social entrepreneurial ecosystem at UNB is that students are coming to the PDC and describing their personal transformations from their experiences with the above programs. Many of them never thought it was possible to do well and to do good in their careers. However, their next question is typically, where can I pursue my education in social entrepreneurship? Despite some examples of courses in social entrepreneurship scattered across the university community, there is very little available to students with diverse backgrounds at UNB or at other Atlantic Canadian universities. Project RECODE Transformation will give us the opportunity to address this gap at UNB by:

1. Conducting an audit of all the courses currently offered at UNB that support concepts in social entrepreneurship and social innovation and then conducting a thorough review of best practices in teaching social innovation and entrepreneurship from around the world.
2. Designing and launching a certificate, diploma or degree program in social innovation and entrepreneurship at UNB and in partnership with other institutions.
3. Evaluating the opportunities for Extended Learning, the use of MOOC's and connection to the Activator experiential learning program already in operation at UNB. Partnering with other universities and colleges in the RECODE network to leverage distance learning resources.
4. Deepening the opportunities for research in the area of social innovation and entrepreneurship.

5. Putting learning into practice – the Living Lab

At UNB, we wish to pull all the key features of the Social Innovation ecosystem together by launching a social venture on campus that will be in itself an incubator of social innovation ideas and a place for students and faculty from various disciplines to collide. This Living Lab will use the community as a laboratory for ideas, provide the opportunity for students to practice what they are learning in the curriculum, create opportunities for faculty to conduct much needed research in the field and serve as a real life model of the challenges of building and scaling social ventures.

The project RECODE Transformation initiative will:

1. Identify faculty champions from across disciplines with an interest in serving in a supervisory capacity for this initiative.

2. Design a model to govern and support this venture despite the turnover of students every few years.
3. Conduct a market study to evaluate potential ideas.
4. Build a business model and conduct market testing and validation.
5. Launch and provide seed capital until the venture becomes self-sustaining.

Transformation at UNB

The RECODE initiative will have two predominant impacts on the university community:

- **Scale.** The current initiatives underway at UNB to drive social innovation and entrepreneurship have created a significant groundswell of activity and interest among students and faculty; however, this engagement has been constrained both in breadth of engagement and in its limitation to extra-curricular activities. The RECODE project will essentially provide the fuel to make these tools available to students and faculty across the university and the community at large. This will allow change makers who would not normally access entrepreneurship programming to take their unique skill sets, connect to the social entrepreneurial ecosystem, and create the opportunity to “collide” with other innovators they may not have otherwise met. This fuel will also drive social innovation and entrepreneurship from an extra-curricular activity to embedding it deep into the curriculum and research agenda of the university, thus creating a stronger matrix of support and engagement opportunities.
- **Visibility/Credibility.** For this ecosystem to take root and thrive in a sustainable manner, all sectors need to be engaged and fully understand the impact. RECODE will give us the support we need to elevate the foundational programming elements to a level of quality and visibility that will attract these much needed stakeholders who will then provide the resources and support to sustain the work in the future. Connection to a national network is critical to giving Atlantic Canadians a voice at the table with corporations, governments, and other stakeholders.

Planning and Impact

Soliciting Feedback

In order to strengthen the ecosystem’s existing programs, the first step will be to gather feedback from participants and stakeholders. Detailed interviews will be conducted with Student Ambassadors, grantees from the Social Innovation Fund and members of the B4 Change cohort along with the mentors, speakers and attendees at the Social Enterprise Development Dialog and Youth Entrepreneurship Summit. We will also use an auditing and market research methodology to assess current gaps in the ecosystem and learn from best practices around the globe.

Testing and Learning

While planning and preparation are key to launching successful initiatives, it is also our philosophy to test and learn by doing. Small projects will thus be launched immediately to evaluate interest and create opportunities to understand what works and what does not. This has been the model used with the Student Ambassador Program, Social Innovation Fund and the B4 Change accelerator. We will follow this same strategy with the launch of new curriculum and Living Lab initiatives.

Measuring Impact

Measuring impact is an on-going challenge with this type of work, as traditional metrics do not always capture true impact. As with all of the programs built to date in UNB's social innovation ecosystem, we are striving to achieve the following key outcomes:

1. Accessibility/Engagement – all students, faculty and community understand the opportunities within the field of social innovation and entrepreneurship, and know how to connect to the ecosystem and access the tools that they need. Measuring percent awareness and touches is critical to this outcome.
2. Growing the size of the idea pipeline – the number of ideas being evaluated continues to grow over time. By increasing the numbers of idea validation experiences, we will generate a higher number of quality, scalable solutions with significant impact.
3. Deepening the pool of and increasing the quality of mentors – this critical component of the ecosystem will facilitate the idea validation process and champion more good ideas from business model development to market/ community implementation.
4. Creating a baseline and measuring progress against key social indicators such as unemployment, wellness, poverty rates, literacy and others. Strong partnerships with the region's measuring bodies will be critical to this longer term impact measurement process.