

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.

University of British Columbia

Hacking Society Social Innovation Zones for Smart Cities

Introduction

Hacking Society is a proposal of the University of British Columbia (“UBC”) to couple our people and our digital infrastructure as an engine for collaborative social innovation across the Metro Vancouver region. In concert with the RECODE Program, our objective is to demonstrate distinctive national and global leadership in both digitally-driven social innovation and in the reinvention of university service to society.

Hacking Society leverages a major investment by UBC in its technical and social capacity for digital scholarship. This capacity is not bound by any faculty or program; it is a signature component of UBC excellence. We intend to open this capacity to accelerate social innovation across the Metro region. Our primary regional partner is the Urban Opus Society (“Urban Opus”), a well-embedded smart city innovation cluster.

Social Entrepreneurship Vision

Our vision is that **social entrepreneurs** champion innovations until societal value is proven. This implies two extensions to tradition campus thinking about entrepreneurship:

- 1) that it is more than invention; and
- 2) that it can be core to scholarship, not just ‘extracurricular’.

We believe this vision will flourish at UBC because **Hacking Society** isn’t subject to specific programs or faculties on campus, but is integral to the shared digital academic infrastructure. This means that all members of the campus community can participate, formally from within programs or in ad-hoc ways and via self-interest. We will be the catalyst, and UBC will become a hub and staging ground for authentic social entrepreneurship opportunities involving regional ‘lead customer’ organizations.

Social Innovation Vision

While ‘hacking’ can imply an asocial or frivolous activity, **Hacking Society** sees **social innovation** as purposefully creating new ways to grow social capital. In our case, using data.

Specific to data this implies that, analogous to money, we need models for individual and collective ownership of data in the global economy. This is a challenge because multinationals, even some governments, aim to ‘corporatize’ data on massive scales. It is

probable that, like telephony, data will become a largely closed marketplace for a few giant players.

We have a short window of opportunity to pioneer the ‘commons’ and ‘green spaces’ on the data frontier. “Trust” is the key: citizens and civil society justifiably have little trust in the entities that currently capture and monetize their data, so what other kind of entity could reasonably innovate with the public trust?

We believe our vision of social innovation can flourish at UBC because universities are essentially the only entity in society that can represent trust at the same time as being able to wrestle objectively with complex issues involving security, privacy, autonomy, etc., and also host the expertise and infrastructure required to undertake true innovation.

Program Description

Hacking Society connotes to “hackathons” (where individuals with diverse skillsets are convened to generate original solutions to a given problem), which have become a staple of innovation ecosystems everywhere. Hacking Society elevates the idea to an ongoing, committed institutional process – a mission.

The UBC Mission Statement refers to the entire campus becoming a “Living Lab” – Hacking Society does precisely this for digitally-intensive social innovation

Hacking Society consolidates a variety of social innovation activities at UBC, but the true inspiration emerged serendipitously from three complementary initiatives:

1. **Digital Asset Platform – ADAM**

Launchpad

UBC is investing in an infrastructure upgrade to create an advanced digital asset management (“ADAM”) system. Why does this matter? Because digital assets (videos, images, datasets, documents, etc.) are the life-blood of teaching, learning, research, and innovation at global universities such as UBC. The new platform will dramatically accelerate UBC’s knowledge generation capacity and its facility for interdisciplinary, multi-sector collaboration and innovation.

2. **Digital Experience Project - UBCDX**

Pilot Training

To fully engage the campus community in the potentials of the new digital infrastructure, UBC is preparing to activate a Digital Experience (“UBCDX”) Project. UBCDX involves the development of advanced analytics, services and programs to systematically capture and amplify the flow of media and ideas. UBCDX will elevate

the digital competencies of students, staff and faculty, and provide avenues for applying and celebrating such competencies in academic and community engagement contexts.

3. Urban Opus Portfolio

Trajectories

For more than a decade the principals of the Urban Opus Society have used the entire city of Vancouver as a living lab for new forms of mobile and digital public engagement. They are cultivating a rapidly-growing portfolio of stakeholder requirements and civic opportunities related to the social realm of smart cities that represent superb trajectories for social entrepreneurship. These are the exciting engagement points for **Hacking Society**.

The Social Realm of Smart Cities

This innovation focus for Hacking Society is critical to the future of society and humanity, but it may not be familiar territory yet for the social innovation community. The following definitions and discussion offer important context:

Smart Cities

Data is transforming humanity – not just disrupting global business models, but challenging the very nature of identity, community and civil society.

Leading global cities have undertaken “**smart city**” projects to harness data and sensors for better efficiency, as with traffic. Cities are modeled as machines. People have largely been left out, except as subjects, which is why smart city ideas have not been received well yet by civil society.

A city’s prosperity depends most on its social capital. The unique **Urban Opus** vision is that social capital, even more complex than traffic, can also be made to flourish via innovative use of data. Imagine schools, communities, culture, health, etc., all revitalized by plugging into the trust, shared intelligence, and dreams of ordinary people.

The smartest sensors have two legs. **Urban Opus** works the magic of “citizen data” to revitalize communities and cities.

Social Realm

The term “public realm” encompasses the streets, parks, open spaces and public buildings that comprise the physical domain of civil society in a city. We introduce the term “**social realm**” to extend the concept of public realm into expanding digital spaces where civil society should have an equivalent and complementary domain, and perhaps would be claim-staked more proactively if the proponents of civil society had better access to, and capacity with, the tools, expertise and technologies that **Hacking Society** is proposing to provide.

The Internet and real world were once entirely separate, but they are being meshed together and becoming integrated at an amazing pace, which is why the social realm is so important. Digital dimensions of the social realm include mobile services, social networking sites, and a great variety of forms of data.

Citizen Engagement

Proponents of the public value of data in cities most often talk about “open data”, which is primarily data that elected governments are obligated to publish freely, along with data other organizations may release for other reasons.

Open data are valuable but other forms are more crucial to fulfilling the social realm. One example is “proprietary data”, typically collected by utilities and corporations operating in the public realm but not published openly. Examples are transit, power, telephone, taxi, etc. Urban Opus has created a ‘trusted brokerage’ with business rules for trading and employing such data in support of the social realm without a requirement to make it open.

The most valuable social realm data is “**citizen data**”, which citizens will voluntarily contribute in return for social value. An example is an app that cyclists could download on their phone to automatically analyze routes and experiences for the collective benefit of a cycling community.

Supporting civic governments and civil society organizations in citizen engagement – in the development of citizen data products and services – is another Urban Opus objective.

This is where **Hacking Society** plays a huge role: the conception, design, prototyping and implementation of such products and services is significantly beyond the capacity of social realm stakeholders, yet easily within the integrity, technology, expertise and invention capacity of the University. It is a perfect context for collaborative social innovation.

The Urban Opus Society is an independent nonprofit – a globally unique smart city innovation cluster focused on the social realm. UBC already collaborates with Urban Opus to provide specific research and engineering capacity for its projects; this proposal dramatically expands that collaboration by seeding Urban Opus projects and stakeholders back into UBC as a means to realize our social innovation potential.

The collaborative rationale is compelling: Urban Opus provides a proactive interface with the external social realm community as well as objective brokerage of urban data sources, while UBC provides an exceptionally fertile social innovation ground.

Following are examples of active Urban Opus projects that could be accelerated in collaboration with **Hacking Society** programs.

- A Metro Vancouver municipality* wishes to expand the 311 system to enable citizens and citizen groups to collectively map, prioritize and voluntarily resolve

issues and opportunities arising in their communities, more than simply reporting problems for the city to fix.

- An energy utility* wishes to promote energy literacy by enabling residents to engage with their smart meter data for electricity and gas, aggregated within neighborhoods, as a motivation for conservation.
- An urban trees society* wishes to cultivate the urban forest via crowd-sourcing the location and status of every single private, park and boulevard tree, together with programs for discovery and ‘adoption’.
- A foundation* and a municipality* wish to create a ‘dashboard’ for social health and vitality across the region by bringing together and cross-correlating live sources of open, proprietary and citizen data.
- A financial institution* wishes to offer anonymized data concerning client bank accounts, debts, spending habits, etc., in order to strengthen communities through a participatory understanding of how healthy flows of money help to generate healthy communities.
- A social housing society* wishes to break through the confusion and delays related to homelessness services by creating a shared mobile application that draws together information concerning shelters, SROs, accessibility, etc., simultaneously across all Metro municipalities.
- A library* wishes to bring together data about the movement of books through its systems, together with data from commercial booksellers, to tell stories about the social life of books and reading in neighborhoods.
- A municipality* wishes to increase voter turn-out in their youth demographic by reaching out to youth communities and youth concerns more effectively through social media analytics.
- A nonprofit technology incubator* wishes to advance the success of startup companies by mapping the dynamic ecosystems of programs, resources, peers and individuals available to support them.

Championship of such social opportunity is within the innovation capacity that Hacking Society offers.

* Organization names are not given in respect of their privacy, in consideration of RECODE’s open policy.

Program Plan

The **Hacking Society** program will be implemented as a specialized extension to the UBC Digital Experience (UBCDX) Project, leveraging cross- faculty engagement with digital scholarship in the academic sense into applied, meaningful social innovation in the real world.

The three-year UBCDX Project includes the following activities:

Analytic Instrument Development

Convening researchers and students, including external industry expertise, to co-create innovative analytic instruments within the flow of media and ideas. An example pertinent to **Hacking Society** is monitoring flow to provide users with collective perceptions of **quality & trust** in their media.

Service Development

A shared testbed for ongoing assessment and creation of tools and services to augment media use and creation. Examples pertinent to **Hacking Society** include tools for **live annotation, collective curation, digital badges, expert finding, and trending media channels.**

Program Delivery

Coordinated events and programs to increase participation, awareness and digital competencies. Examples pertinent to **Hacking Society** include **communications, contests, hackathons, and a Digital Makers Faire.**

The proposed Hacking Society activities will run parallel to UBCDX, with a specific focus on social innovation:

Social Hackathons

Working within the network and across the campus, **Hacking Society** will reach out to students, staff and faculty to participate in seasonal 1-day and 3-day open hackathons themed to specific to Social Realm opportunity domains (e.g. “community health”) with the direct involvement of regional stakeholders and lead customers. Using the network we will facilitate the creation of multidisciplinary and broadly skilled teams to address each challenge, and we will employ UBC’s new ADAM system as a digital incubator for rapid, versatile deployment and ongoing recombination of ideas and resources. The best emerging social innovation concepts, and the most inspired social entrepreneurs, will be coached toward social ventures, with tiered levels of prototyping, field-testing, market research and operationalization, as appropriate.

Social Innovation Collaboratory

Hacking Society will provide innovation management competencies to the definition and execution of targeted social innovation projects involving qualified social entrepreneurs, lead customers from the external community, and additional stakeholders. Depending on the scope and duration of each project, execution could include integration with courses and programs, leveraging of research funding, and the participation of undergraduate, graduate and faculty researchers. Each project will normally involve a minimum of a matching investment by community participants and stakeholders.

Community Development

Hacking Society will additionally deliver engagement programs designed to raise the profile of social innovation at UBC to full “Living Lab” status, including participation by all faculties and units across the University. This activity will involve the coordination of communications, workshops and events on- and off-campus.

During the 3-year activation phase of **Hacking Society** we commit to building the additional relationships necessary for the Program to become self-sustaining.