Researching Post-Secondary Social Innovation Initiatives: Challenge Brief

1. BACKGROUND

Leading institutions have recognized that post-secondary has an opportunity to complement their core functions of teaching and research, by more effectively addressing the social, environmental, economic and cultural challenges in the communities they serve.

Many Canadian institutions are using innovative approaches to expand their contribution to their communities' wellbeing. They are also actively collaborating with community to jointly address chronic problems. Yet, despite best intentions, many innovations remain niche and are struggling to scale. Innovative approaches face internal barriers that make mainstreaming them difficult: from the limited scope and scale of innovations, to the organizational culture, to limited incentives in the system.

In response, RECODE and the Spanish-based organization UpSocial are researching how Canadian post-secondary institutions could adapt to more adequately address community needs. A workshop was held in November 2017 in Toronto to identify specific areas of interest, and subsequent interviews and research has further informed our work. A summary of the workshop and interviews are annexed to this document.

The goal of this research process is to find innovations that have been successfully implemented around the world, including Canada, and to explore the feasibility of implementing them in Canada. In addition to identifying **what** has been done, we are also motivated to understand the enabling conditions: **how** it was done and **why** it worked.

Guiding question: How can post-secondary institutions transform their internal practices and structures to more actively contribute to positive social change?

This project will identify what works, extract lessons learned, and explore the possibilities of adaptation to enhance post-secondary capacity to contribute to society. The search will focus on the following areas:

- Incentive structures for faculty that supports community-centered research and collaboration;
- Inclusive and equitable retention strategies for faculty, administration, and governance; and
- Safe and healthy campuses for students and staff.

2. KEY DATA AND CONSIDERATIONS

Institutional Incentive Structures

- The post-secondary community uses a vast array of measures to gauge their success. The majority of rewards and funding are closely related to achievements in, and recognition of, an institution's research.[1] If a university or college's contribution to community wellbeing were a significant indicator of their overall ranking, or if measures of institutional quality considered environmental and social impact, senior leadership may be differently motivated, and may encourage faculty to experiment with innovative ways of teaching, or knitting closer ties to the community.

- Currently approximately 20% of faculty evaluation processes consider contributions beyond conventional research and teaching. When the bulk of assessment is encouraging adherence to the status quo, there is little incentive for faculty to be more innovative or community-focused in their practices. What would a broader incentive structure for faculty look like? What measures of success could be introduced to generate shared value for academia and community?

Diversity and Equity in Governance, Faculty, and Administration

- The employment numbers of visible minorities and indigenous people in postsecondary institutions has not significantly changed in the last 30 years, indicating that most employment equity policies and leadership diversity policies have not achieved their stated goals.[2] For example, in 2016, 96% of leadership positions at Canada's 15 research-intensive universities (U15) were held by white men and women. Not a single U15 had a visible minority woman or Indigenous man or woman on their presidential or vice-presidential leadership teams.[3]

- This lack of diversity adversely affects staff and student populations in various ways; cultural biases and a lack of role modeling may negatively impact tracks to advancement and retention. Further, the lack of lived experience and cultural understanding in an institution's leadership and faculty reduces the confidence and progression of minority populations through these systems and in the broader culture.

Safe and Healthy Environments

- Mental health is a major concern for both staff and students on Canadian campuses. 10% of students have considered suicide at least once during their

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[1] The Economist (2015). "The world is going to university".
https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21647285-more-and-more-money-being-spent-higher-education-too-little-known-about-whether-it

[2] Seatter, E. (2016). Canadian Universities failing at diversity: Study.
https://ricochet.media/en/1588/canadian-universities-failing-at-diversity-study

[3] Academic Women's Association - University of Alberta. "The diversity gap in university leadership" https://uofaawa.wordpress.com/awa-diversity-gap-campaign/the-diversity-gap-in-university-leadership/
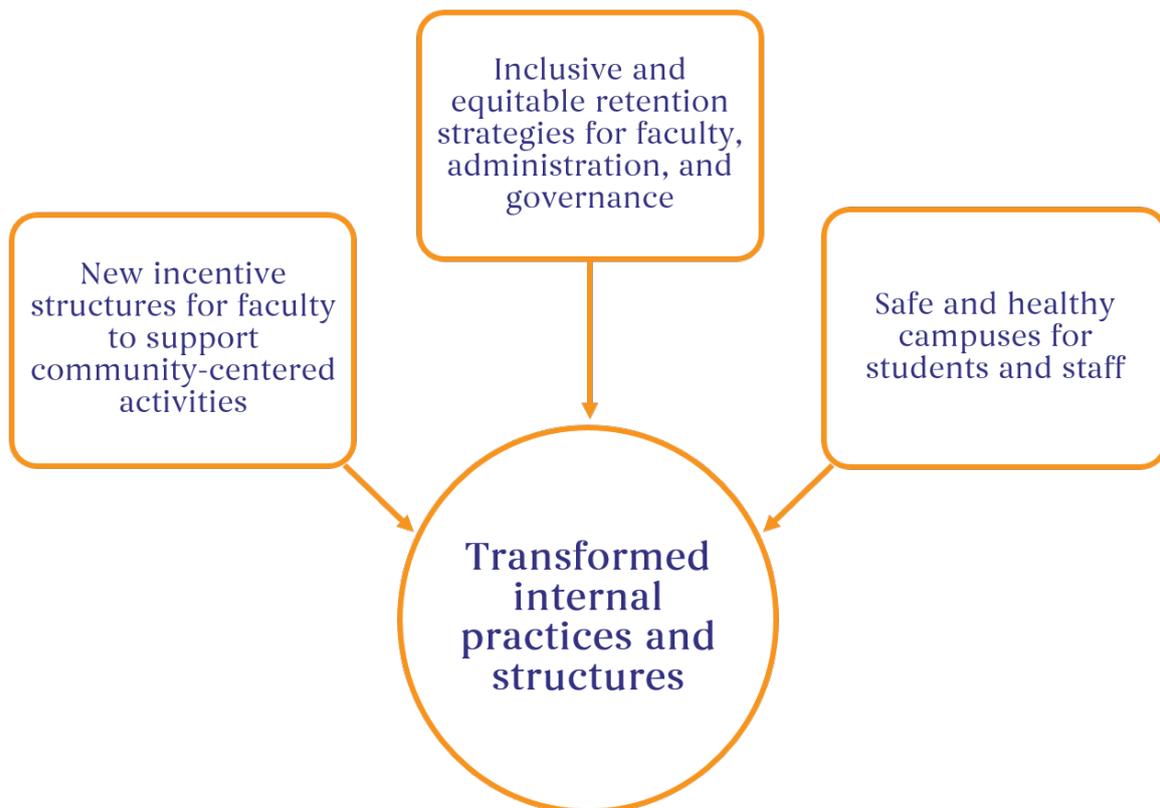
time at university or college[4], and a 2016 Ontario study found that, in the previous year, 65% of students reported experiencing overwhelming anxiety, and 46% felt so depressed that it was difficult to function.

3. TARGET GROUPS

While faculty and administration are our primary target group, additional research might also uncover innovations that have created collaborative, safe and healthy institutional cultures for students and staff alike.

4. AREAS OF RESEARCH

The research areas were chosen because they all target organizational transformation, which, in turn, increases organizational capacity to contribute to societal transformation. We seek to respond to pressing concerns facing Canadian institutions, such as campus safety, but also longer-term culture change that encourages greater community collaboration and contribution.

Inclusive and equitable retention strategies for faculty, administration, and governance

New incentive structures for faculty to support community-centered activities

Safe and healthy campuses for students and staff

Transformed internal practices and structures

[4] Wiljer, D., Abi-Jaoude, A., Johnson, A., Ferguson, G., Sanches, M., Levinson, A., ... Voineskos, A. (2016). Enhancing Self-Efficacy for Help-Seeking Among Transition-Aged Youth in Postsecondary Settings With Mental Health and/or Substance Use Concerns, Using Crowd-Sourced Online and Mobile Technologies: The Thought Spot Protocol. JMIR Research Protocols, 5(4), e201. http://doi.org/10.2196/resprot.6446

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INSTITUTIONAL INCENTIVES STRUCTURES:
Traditional incentives for university and college faculty are focused on individual metrics of success: tenure, journal publication and individual awards for excellence, among others. Incentives at the administration level are often connected to access to funding, recognition, and branding. These longstanding incentives tend to produce competitive, individualistic environments that are often antithetical to collaborative processes. This lever for change will examine novel ways to motivate and reward faculty and post-secondary leadership teams and promote effective and measurable involvement in community.

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY IN GOVERNANCE, FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION
Despite stated intentions to diversify their staff, like other public institutions, post-secondary has not met many of its stated diversity objectives. This area of research will look for innovative policies and practices that have helped increase diversity as well as equitable promotion and retention strategies.

SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS
In response to the current mental health crisis, many institutions are striving to improve the provision of mental health services on their campuses. The research team will work to build on these current efforts and look for interventions that support the holistic health of both students and staff, including those targeting high-priority groups.

We will be looking for innovations that create a more supportive campus climate. The innovations should also promote up-to-date and patient-centered counselling and intervention strategies, including specific strategies for high-risk groups, such as survivors of sexual violence. Finally, these innovations should contribute to staff and students' involvement in a proactive mental health strategy, providing them with self-management competencies, coping skills, and capacities to manage crises.

We recognize that this is an ambitious agenda. Our focus is to concentrate on the structural and cultural norms and practices that we believe offer the most opportunities for transformation and, if successful, could have the biggest impact both inside post-secondary and in broader society.

5. IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION OF INNOVATIONS

Canada is a vast and diverse country; each project and potential solution may have to be adapted locally and sometimes individually to cater to unique regional, social and cultural contexts.

The identified proposals must meet the following requirements:

- **Proven innovation**: the initiative has documented success and development.
- **Non-context specific**: the innovation is adaptable to a different context.

- **Orientation to scalability:** the methodology has been packaged or at least adapted somewhere else.
- **Good return on investment**: the innovation optimizes the use of resources or taps into latent or underutilized resources.

To assess the relevance and adequacy of the innovations, the following criteria will be considered by the jury:

- **Potential impact on the local context**: assessment of the degree to which the innovation can produce results that wholly or partly meet the challenge in question.
- **Ability to be executed/ implemented in the local context:** considering relevant political, social, cultural, and geographical conditions
- **Degree of innovation:** how different the innovation is compared with the local solutions that already attempt to address a problem.
- **Potential of scalability:** how implementation may be supported for scaling out across the system or more deeply into the cultural norms of the individual institution or post-secondary sector.