

Innovation in Higher Ed

Results of a global scan



THE CONTEXT:

An opportunity exists for universities and colleges to complement their core teaching and research functions by using the many resources at their disposal to better address community needs and increase wellbeing. As schools start down this path, however, they encounter internal cultural and structural barriers.

Recognizing this, RECODE and UpSocial undertook a global scan to search for innovative responses to these challenges. The aim was to surface examples from organizations that had transformed their internal practices, and in so doing, created enabling conditions for increasing social impact.

The research comprised 3 key areas¹:

1. Safe and Healthy Campuses
2. Inclusion and Diversity
3. Community-Centred Collaborations

Fifteen innovations were presented to Canadian leaders who assessed their potential for implementation in Canada. The group assessed potential impact and feasibility and ultimately selected the six innovations with the highest potential for scale:

4. SAFE AND HEALTHY CAMPUSES

- a. Mental Health First Aid
- b. For-credit course in Wellness, University of Illinois: Chicago
- c. Big White Wall
- d. The Support Network

5. INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

- a. Te Wangana o Aotearoa

6. COMMUNITY-CENTRED COLLABORATIONS

- a. Nipissing University: Tenure and Promotion

¹ These areas are depicted more in detail in the [Challenge Brief](#)

OVERVIEW OF INNOVATIONS:

1. SAFE AND HEALTHY CAMPUSES

Many institutions are striving to improve the provision of mental health services. We looked for examples that supported both students and staff, focused on proactive early interventions, fostered a supportive campus climate around mental health, and took a patient-centred approach.

- a. **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training provides a person with no clinical training the knowledge and skills to assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis, until professional help is received or the crisis resolves. Originally from Australia, the program has been adopted by more than 20 countries, and over 2 million people worldwide have been trained in MHFA.

Assets and Opportunities:	Potential Barriers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Easily scalable, well-conceived model.– Fosters a culture that acknowledges mental health as a “real” health issue.– Already implemented in some Canadian post-secondary institutions with very positive results.– Customizable for different demographic groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Cost and time for participation.– Training cannot be standalone. It must be paired with ongoing, preventative mental health support.– Unclear whether the versions of the course that were developed for Inuit and First Nations were accurately developed and culturally informed.

- b. **For-Credit Wellness Course** is an elective course designed and implemented at the University of Illinois Chicago, to improve individual wellbeing. It focuses on strategies and knowledge for improved mental health and lifelong wellbeing.

Assets and Opportunities:	Potential Barriers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Low-cost way to educate about self-care and time-management.– Integrated into student’s curriculum breaks down barriers of time and stigma.– If linked with other support services, this has potential to transform the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Creating a new course is a lengthy process that requires significant up-front investment.– Finding the right instructors to deliver this material could be challenging.– As an elective, it is limited in its reach, but making it mandatory could change students’ receptivity to the content.

- c. **Big White Wall** is a clinically-supported online platform, facilitated by experienced healthcare professionals. It offers a selection of professional services to help members self-manage their mental wellbeing, anonymously, at any time.

Assets and Opportunities:	Potential Barriers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Easily scalable and implementable in diverse campus settings and sizes. – Can support a large volume of users. – Evidence of success by randomized control trials. – Serves non-critical cases, which helps offset the risk of escalation to acute cases needing professional help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use of digital-based tools is a concern, given that the digital world is a significant contributor to anxiety, isolation, and poor mental health. – Only available in English. May have cultural barriers, too. – Requires that employers or supporting agencies sponsor the platform; the cost of this for-profit model may deter widespread uptake. – Doesn't address root causes.

- d. **The Support Network** is a program comprised of peer-facilitated support groups and community events which aim to promote student mental wellbeing. The Network creates an inclusive space to engage openly and create meaningful peer-to-peer relationships of support.

Assets and Opportunities:	Potential Barriers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Student-led and student-driven. – Complements other initiatives and student support services on- and off-campus. – Good program for students who need support, and not medication. – Reduces stigma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participation relies on drop-in. – Recruiting and training student leaders could be challenging. – Some cases might be too much for students leaders to manage without seeking professional advice. – Evidence and external validation missing to back up impact.

2. INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY:

Despite stated intentions to diversify their staff, post-secondary has not met many of its stated diversity objectives. Our research in this area identified innovative policies and practices that have helped increase diversity. We also searched for examples of equitable promotion and retention strategies.

- a. **Te Wananga o Aotearoa** is the second largest tertiary education provider in New Zealand. It offers a comprehensive range of certificate to degree-level programs in over 40 campuses and to 31,000 students nationwide. Guided by Māori principles and values, Te Wananga o Aotearoa nurtures an inclusive learning environment, through a diversity of courses.

Assets and Opportunities:	Potential Barriers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Consolidated initiative far into its development cycle with proven financial sustainability, involvement of the whole community, impressive impact results and scale.– The New Zealand/Maori relationship is globally regarded as an exemplar for reconciliation. Te Wānanga exemplifies this leadership.– Rongo Wetere, one of the co-founders of Te Wānanga, resides in Ontario.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Adaptation to a Canadian context would be challenging due to Canada’s vastly different indigenous history and context.– Unlike New Zealand, there are hundreds of diverse First Nations in Canada.– In Canada, Education and Indigenous affairs cross federal and provincial jurisdictions of control. Policy changes in either area are hence complicated.– Canada is many years behind New Zealand in Reconciliation and support for Indigenous peoples.

3. COMMUNITY-CENTRED RESEARCH & COLLABORATION: INCENTIVE STRUCTURES FOR FACULTY

Traditional incentive structures in universities and colleges tend to produce competitive, individualistic environments that are antithetical to collaboration. In this area, we looked for novel ways that universities and colleges are motivating faculty and post-secondary leaders to work collaboratively, as well as ways to promote their involvement in community-based work.

- a. **Tenure and Promotion at Nipissing University** integrates Ernest Boyer’s “Four Domains of Scholarship” in their evaluation processes. This academic model advocates for the expansion of the traditional definition of *scholarship and research*, by regarding academic service to community as equal to other traditional criteria.

Assets and Opportunities:	Potential Barriers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Nipissing demonstrates that changes to tenure and promotion policies help to embed community engagement in the institutional mission– Nipissing prioritizes collaboration with Indigenous communities, but other institutions could easily focus on engagement with different communities in their region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Difficult to adopt in larger universities because of deeply ingrained, traditional tenure and promotion policies.– Not directly applicable to the college sector because of differences in faculty hiring and tenure systems.– Lack of clarity around how to measure the impact of using Boyer’s four domains of scholarship; how is merit adjudicated?– There is a possibility that tenure and promotion policies may radically change soon.

NEXT STEPS:

<p>January 2019 – June 2019</p>	<p>Prepare for implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Liaise with Canadian schools, networks and leaders who are well-situated to explore the adaptation of the selected innovations. ● Explore what adaptations would be necessary to each innovation to make it serve the Canadian context. ● Arrange visits between interested adopters and the original innovators.
<p>March 2019 – May 2019</p>	<p>Visits of the innovators: The format of the visits will depend on the innovation and the interested Canadian groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public events to generate further interest around the innovation. ● Presentation of process and initiatives. ● Workshops oriented toward implementation for interested and committed institutions. ● Individual meetings between innovators and organizations who would like to participate in a pilot project.
<p>June 2019 onward</p>	<p>Implementation of selected pilot projects in some Canadian post-secondary institutions.</p>

APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDERS

Participants

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Guests

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