

Sustainability Project Fund Application Form

Project Title: *Integrated Education for Sustainability at McGill*

Budget Requested: \$32 032

Applicant/Project Leader:

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I. Project Overview

The goals of this project are:

- to explore opportunities for **coordinating and expanding applied research and experiential learning** at McGill that **benefits both the campus and the broader community**, and

- to identify **potential structures** for a **university-wide hub** where **students, faculty and staff** could access these types of **learning and research**.

In so doing, we aim to **integrate three key facets of the university's mission** – to be **research-intensive** and **student-centred** while providing **service to society**.

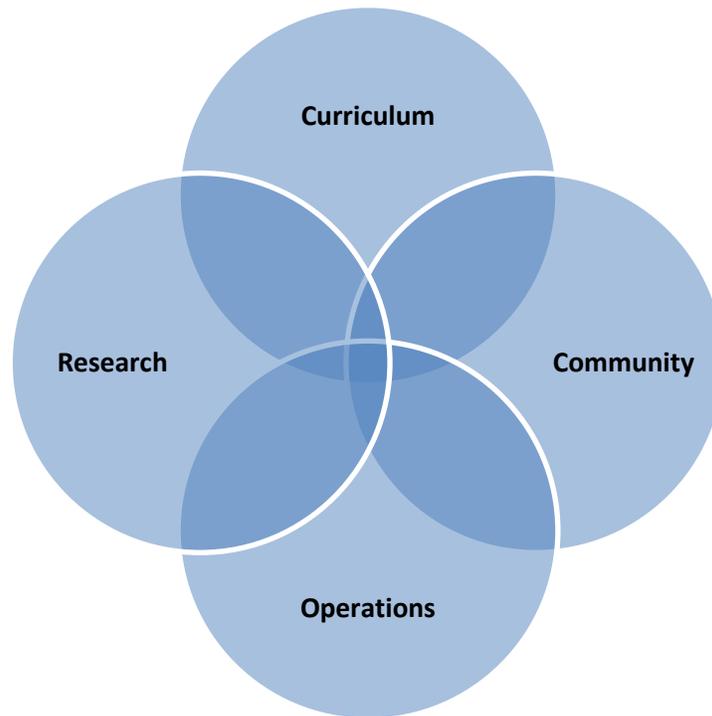
One **key strategy** for achieving these objectives is for **McGill to position itself as a facilitator of campus-community partnerships**. The **four key areas** of the University as defined by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) are: **curriculum, research, operations and community outreach** (see Figure 1).

The **questions** at the heart of this proposal are:

- What **opportunities for learning** already exist that link these areas?
- What are the **main challenges to linking** these areas?
- What **structure(s)** can we put into place to promote meaningful learning for individuals and McGill as a whole, and to foster **mutually beneficial relationships** between the campus and the broader community?

We propose that the project team, with representatives from **Student Services, the Research and International Relations Office, the Office of Sustainability, and Teaching and Learning Services**, is well-positioned to explore the linkages between these areas and develop a proposal for a structure that would facilitate their continued growth and evolution.

Figure 1: AASHE Framework. Chase, G. Domains of Sustainability in Higher Education. Handout distributed at *Sustainability and Curriculum: Workshop for Campus Leaders*. American Association of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), San Diego State University, June 2008.



The proposed project requires support for:

- Half the time of the Sustainability Advisor, under the leadership of the Executive Director of Student Services, for the duration of the 2012-2013 academic year. The Sustainability Advisor will liaise across University portfolios to achieve the milestones listed in the Project Implementation section below.
- A temporary contractor to undertake the following:
 - Review knowledge mobilization models at other universities (10 hours)
 - Prepare and participate in committee meetings (10 hours)
 - Review knowledge mobilization projects at McGill (20 hours)

Knowledge mobilization means that information and expertise is shared and deployed in partnership with community stakeholders and in active service to societal concerns. The concept has been used in the academic setting for at least two decades, even if the terminology

is more recent. In the 1990s there was an increasing awareness of the need for universities to partake in bidirectional relationships with the public (partnerships), rather than continuing to act as though knowledge was unidirectional, flowing from the university to its exterior. This was part of an effort to escape the typical and oft criticized top-down approach of academia. Increased access to the results of research was a starting point, allowing more members of the public as well as other researchers to keep abreast of the latest findings. This has been followed by an emphasis on engagement with communities outside of academia in light of the theoretical position that knowledge is not merely found, but created and influenced by different experiences. Certainly the public can learn much from university research, but the reverse is also true, especially when it comes to understanding the needs of a community. Improved dialogue and collaboration are beneficial for laying out the most productive research topics and methods, which is important to consider when these communities are stakeholders in and funders of research.

Research and International Relations (RIR) is in discussion with a current part-time employee who specializes in university-community engagement to take on the contractor role. The contractor would report to the RIR Special Projects Officer and/or her Director, while also participating on the advisory committee described in the “Milestones” section below.

Stakeholders:

Ultimately, the stakeholders for this project will include **all sectors of the university** and a **broad range of community partners**. The list below outlines the goals and contributions of the stakeholders that constitute the project team:

Students (contributed by Susanna Klassen):

Among students, the value of and demand for applied learning opportunities has grown significantly. As both a student who has been engaged in Applied Student Research (ASR) projects on campus, and an intern that has worked for over a year to try to facilitate more of these opportunities, I can attest to the countless barriers and lack of support that prevent this movement from growing, and prevent McGill from being a leader in sustainability and student experience. There have also been several student research projects that identify these needs quite clearly, such as Dana Lahey's University United report about ASR for sustainability, and Max Luke's independent study on Integrating Sustainability into the Curriculum through experiential learning. In general, there is an overwhelming lack of:

- Coordination of projects
- Information about relevant courses
- Formal avenues to carry out projects for credit
- Partnerships with relevant organizations and units both internal and external to the campus community

- Recognition for faculty members engaged in this type of research, teaching and learning

There have been several efforts made by students, staff and faculty to address these roadblocks, however many of these initiatives and projects are not able to reach their full potential, and some have lost momentum altogether. This is due, in large part, to the disjointed nature of these efforts, making it difficult for initiatives to gain traction. A coordination hub for this type of research and learning is necessary to ensure that these efforts are not lost. More specifically, enhanced coordination would:

- Provide support for existing efforts and initiatives that create these opportunities
- Create and house institutional memory (e.g., project reports)
- Provide information and support to students looking for applied learning opportunities (e.g., partnership with community groups, projects ideas, faculty supervisors)
- Support project development
- Build new research partnerships within the McGill community and in the broader Montreal community
- Help administer and support ASR courses (e.g., new course proposed by ASR & Curriculum Interns, ENVR 401 and GEOG 496 projects, etc.)

Student Services:

Our unit aims to increase experiential learning opportunities offered at McGill in collaboration with students, faculty, community partners, and other administrative units at the university. Student Services' Career Planning Service will be working closely with McGill's Office of Research and International Relations and Development and Alumni Relations to strengthen connections between campus and community partners, with the goal of broadening the scope and accessibility of experiential learning. This will be achieved through the coordination and development of a diverse range of learning and research activities, including those embedded in curriculum and co-curricular opportunities such as internships. We see this as an essential component of a rich and comprehensive student experience, and of the resources students require to make meaningful contributions to society.

Research and International Relations (including Quartier de l'innovation):

McGill faculty and student researchers across all disciplines work with external partners to identify and consider questions, and apply knowledge and practical skills to try to find solutions to challenges that exist in the world. Major initiatives, such as the Quartier de l'innovation project led by RIR, aim to develop an integrated approach to research, learning, innovation and community engagement in Montreal's Griffintown neighbourhood. Other community

engagement and development activities occur elsewhere on the larger provincial, national and international scales.

Through this project, RIR aims to identify the different types of knowledge mobilization (KM) activities undertaken by McGill researchers undertaken with community partners. Working with other campus groups, we aim to explore different structural and interpersonal connections that help these partnerships to result in successful outcomes for multiple stakeholders on and off campus. In particular, we aim to explore possibilities for better integrating student programming and faculty-based research activities. We will study different models for coordinating community engagement and KM programming at other leading universities and begin to identify a model and benchmarks that would be appropriate for measuring successful programming at McGill. There is also interest in exploring expanded linkages to McGill staff and alumni, who, if integrated, could facilitate programming and engagement with community organizations.

Teaching and Learning Services:

The mission of Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) is to collaborate with teaching, learning and administrative units to create supportive, adaptable and innovative learning environments in which outstanding teaching at all levels is nurtured, recognized and rewarded. With this collaborative project between TLS, Student Services, the Office of Research and International Relations, and the Office of Sustainability we hope to uncover the connections between our respective mandates so that together, we can all promote an integrated vision of sustainability at McGill.

In these initial stages of planning, it seems that one of the clearest areas for collaboration is experiential learning. Our entry point into this collaboration is the work we have done with professors to enhance undergraduate students' understanding of research. We would like to work with our partners to explore linking the TLS interest in undergraduate research with these other units' interests in community-based learning, applied student research, and faculty research projects. Our goals would be to enhance the number, quality and awareness of these types of experiential learning opportunities for all students at McGill.

Office of Sustainability:

A pillar of the founding mandate of both the Office of Sustainability and of the Sustainability Projects Fund, applied learning for students and faculty alike has become increasingly important at McGill. Despite the identified lack of a coordinating hub, several collaborative and community based applied learning projects have emerged at McGill in the past few years (e.g., McGill Food Systems Project, the McGill Farmers' Market, McGill Energy Project, TEVA recycling, the Community Action Toolkit, and various internship opportunities, etc.). Within the Office of Sustainability there currently exist two internship positions that support and facilitate

applied learning, however, as described above, there is an overwhelming need for capacity building in order to coordinate initiatives and implement projects across McGill. Coordination of these projects is now required to enhance efforts, and to make such opportunities more accessible to the entire McGill community.

II. Project Implementation

Milestones:

The project team aims to complete the following by May 2013:

- Convene advisory committee made up of faculty, students, and administration to guide the process
- Through multiple means of consultation (including aligning with existing consultation strategies and creating new opportunities where appropriate), identify a broad range of applied research and learning, community engagement, and citizenship development activities/units on campus
- Create fora through which diverse campus stakeholders can share information about existing relevant initiatives and resources, and identify opportunities for expanding these through collaboration
- Conduct a needs assessment across portfolios for coordination, promotion, and expansion of these activities and initiatives
- Identify successful practices in these areas at other leading universities
- Identify appropriate models for advancing McGill's progress in these areas, including funding needs and opportunities, as well as models for institutionalization.

III. Financials

Budget

Revenue Source	Amount Requested	Confirmed?
Sustainability Projects Fund	\$31 032 for half-time position + \$1000 for contractor Total request = \$32 032	No

IV. Additional information:

- *Letters of commitment*

Will be sent separately to the Sustainability Projects Fund Administrator.

- *Additional list of processes/reports that support this?*

“The existing curriculum in higher education has not been developed to examine how we shape a sustainable world. Much of the curriculum has been developed to provide students with an increasingly narrow understanding of disciplines, professions and jobs and is focused on specific knowledge and skills employed in the given area. What is needed is a curriculum that prepares learners for living sustainably, both professionally and personally, and that explicitly helps the learner deeply understand the interactions, inter-connections, and the consequences of actions and decisions. Regardless of the subject of the curriculum, students must learn and practice holistic systems thinking and be able to apply such thinking to real world situations. Furthermore, students must understand how the systems of which they are a part (social, economic, and ecological) function and are integrated. In order to accomplish this we need a significant segment of the learning opportunities for students to be structured to accomplish these outcomes. To do so will require significant changes in the curriculum and the pedagogy used to deliver that curriculum.”

From “Sustainability Curriculum in Higher Education: A Call to Action” (2010),
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, p.2.

Advancing **research and learning that facilitates engaged citizenship** has been identified as a **priority across McGill**. The recommendations emerging in 2011 from the **Principal’s Task Force on Diversity, Excellence, and Community Engagement** at McGill include “**build[ing] innovatively and progressively on the University’s history of service to society** and thereby expanding opportunities for research, scholarship, and learning.” The recently completed **Situational Analysis for McGill’s Vision 2020** process also identifies **engaged citizenship as a priority** for the campus. In November 2011, **Teaching and Learning Services** organized a **joint session between Senate and the Board of Governors** to draw attention to important efforts to reinforce and further identify **new strategies to enhance undergraduate research experience**. The University’s **new academic plan** is currently in consultation alongside a refreshed **strategic research plan**. Working groups were formed by the **Provost’s office** to assess the need to better understand and reinforce **McGill’s service and impact to local and global communities**. A third working group was also established to improve the overall experience, training and career progression for McGill’s professional staff, which involves the ability to add deeper meaning to their daily activities, be mentored and transfer knowledge to others. The recommendations from these groups are shaping both documents, which are currently in consultation. For example, the Strategic Research Plan will explicitly **rally researchers under a banner of engagement and knowledge mobilization**, which includes the pursuit of **creative solutions to problem-based questions through strategic partnerships**. The **Vice-Principal (Research and International Relations)** is spearheading several important projects in this vein including the **Quartier de l’innovation** project, which will provide platforms for the **exchange of ideas, promotion of entrepreneurship, and community development** through social and

commercial innovation. As part of this strategic investment and new infrastructure, RIR has established the McGill University Business Engagement Centre (MUBEC) to maximize industry partnerships and commercial outputs, and is also spearheading a **knowledge mobilization study** with the aim of establishing **structural changes to nurture innovation, partnerships and return to society**.

Academic practices that combine **experience-based learning and research** with reflection opportunities and established curricular objectives are **vital to fostering beneficial relationships between universities and communities**. Many **universities across Canada and the United States** have **offices dedicated to coordinating and supporting** these types of learning and research. See www.campuscompact.org and <http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/> for examples of these.

Engagement projects and initiatives are **known by many names at McGill**, including service to community, community service learning, philanthropy, applied research, experiential learning, and knowledge mobilization. They also include the many internship and practicum opportunities that are core components of student curricula in diverse faculties and departments. While there are significant theoretical and practical distinctions between these initiatives, they all serve to **cultivate engaged citizenship in students, faculty, administration**, and in the relationship that McGill as a whole has with the broader community. This project aims to identify strategies for **connecting, coordinating, and expanding** on these initiatives, and to **heighten their profile** both within the **McGill community** and with **current and potential partners**.