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# Creating Platforms for Social Realization and Impact

Karla Boluk  
*University of Waterloo*

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## **Creating Platforms for Social Realization and Impact**

*Karla Boluk, University of Waterloo, Canada*

The aim of this paper is to outline and closely inspect two specific competitions, *The Big Ideas Challenge for Health and Wellbeing* and *Hack4Health*, both co-organized by the author in 2014/2015. The paper will explore such social entrepreneurship competitions alongside the social impact literature. Specifically, the paper will examine the challenges in organizing events on university campuses in regard to securing funds, recruiting and motivating a dynamic team, navigating administrative support and the use of language in student recruitment. Furthermore, the paper will explore a variety of opportunities such as bridging and sustaining meaningful impacts with communities (locally and internationally), transformative student experiences, sustained sponsorship, curriculum design and the formulation of a Social Impact Network (SIN).

The intention of the *Big Ideas Challenge* and *Hack4Health* were to a) provide an experiential opportunity for Applied Health Sciences (AHS) students (including the Departments of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Health and Kinesiology) to engage with their community and respond to pressing problems; b) create a platform for students who may not have previously considered their entrepreneurial capability; and c) to highlight the need for integrating social entrepreneurship to the curricular offerings within AHS. The *Big Ideas Challenge* encouraged students to consider ways to improve the health and wellbeing of their community, however personally defined. Following an expression of interest, students were taken through a series of workshops including how to develop a lean canvas, funding and financing and guidelines on how to deliver an effective pitch. The workshops provided opportunities for the students to develop and refine their ideas and network with faculty, staff and representatives from the wider health community. *Hack4Health* was a 36-hour wellness hackathon. Students were presented with the challenge to improve the quality of life of those affected by Multiple Sclerosis, Alzheimer's or other related dementias. Improvements were encouraged by way of social solutions, hardware or software. Following a World Café, students formulated teams across disciplines and had the unique opportunity to work alongside those living with or affected by the diseases. Accordingly, activists, occupational therapists and leading entrepreneurs in the community provided mentorship throughout the weekend leading up to the final pitch competition.

Winners of both social impact challenges were provided with further networking opportunities, mentorship and incubation space and accommodation in the only live-in incubator in North America focused on social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, five students were invited to attend, alongside their professors, and speak on a panel about social impact pathways on university campuses at the ASHOKA U Exchange in New Orleans in February 2016.

Following the execution of both events, the organizers were shortlisted for a *Cordes Social Innovation Award* and were contacted by several staff and faculty on campus and event organizers within the community and in North America for insights in planning social impact events. Both challenges resulted in strengthening the already strong innovation

ecosystem within the region, the design of a faculty-wide course on social entrepreneurship (focused on health and well-being), the formulation of the Social Impact Network, a number of internal (Ryerson University and Wilfrid Laurier) and international partnerships (Southampton University and ASHOKA). The project led to a number of other social impact events providing opportunities for students to collaborate across institutions.