# GUELPH CIVIC INNOVATION AWARD: REPORT

**Program Partners** (deliver the program)
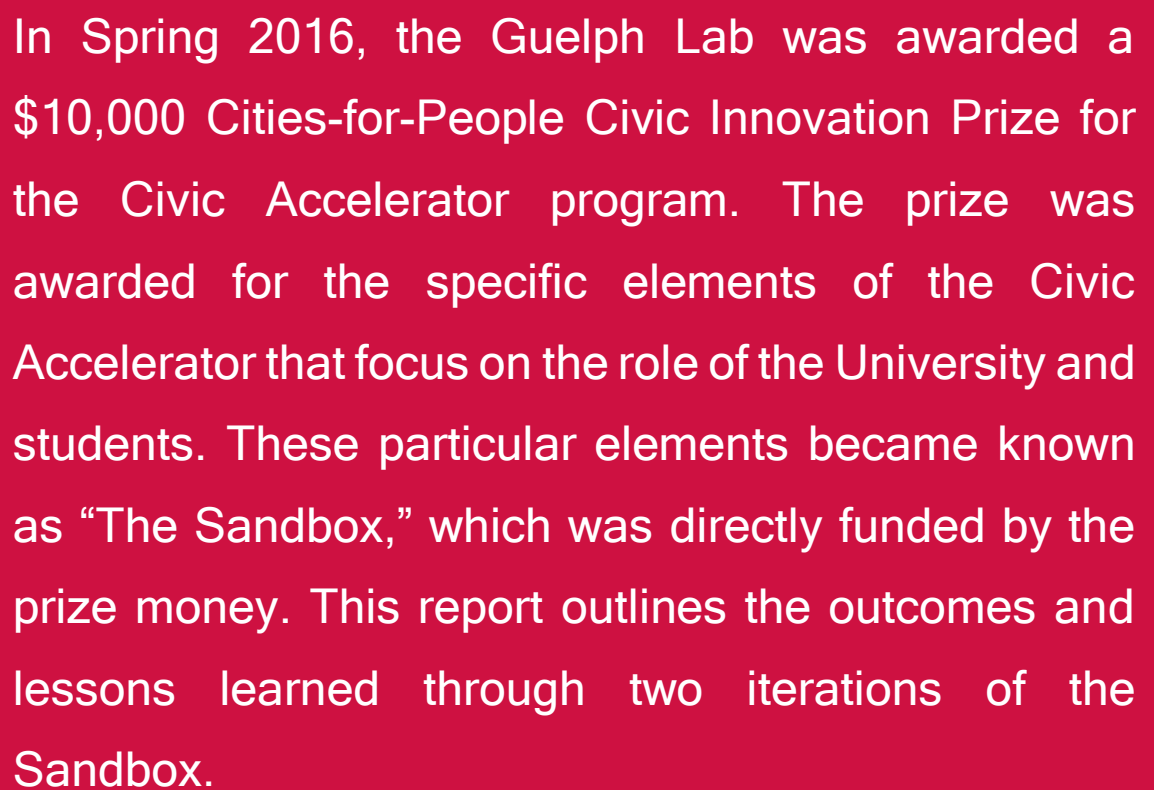


**Community Partners** (identify projects, work on projects with students)

In Spring 2016, the Guelph Lab was awarded a $10,000 Cities-for-People Civic Innovation Prize for the Civic Accelerator program. The prize was awarded for the specific elements of the Civic Accelerator that focus on the role of the University and students. These particular elements became known as "The Sandbox," which was directly funded by the prize money. This report outlines the outcomes and lessons learned through two iterations of the Sandbox.

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# SUMMARY

The Civic Accelerator is an approach to public-sector procurement designed to harness the creative energy of students, businesses, and the wider community, and combines elements of challenge competitions, business accelerators, and prototyping, to learn how potential solutions work *in practice* before full implementation.

The particular elements of the Civic Accelerator that focused on the role of the University and students is now known as "The Sandbox" and was directly supported by the Civic Innovation Prize. In short, the Sandbox pairs interdisciplinary teams of students with new or emerging ventures that respond to community-identified priorities. Each venture receives seed funds and students are paid a stipend.

The two Sandbox projects have generated promising outcomes, and with the Civic Innovation Prize as a catalyst, further internal funds have been committed to support future projects. Key learning objectives for the future include exploring opportunities to leverage University "social infrastructure" in the development of social enterprises, and engaging with critical equity questions related to who is able to own / launch ventures (and who isn't).

Scaling of the Civic Accelerator will potentially generate new projects for the Sandbox, providing opportunities to link students and City procurement in addressing community priorities. (After a year-long hiatus, the Civic Accelerator secured substantial Provincial funding in 2018 to refine and scale the model).

## Project #1: September – December 2017

The City was upgrading to "Smart" street lights, which rely on networks of wireless routers. The resulting "mesh network" has the potential to not only improve city services but can also address a wide range of environmental and social goals. Three students worked on a range of potential ideas that could leverage this network. They proposed a co-operatively owned platform that would use the network to share highly localised histories and stories with the goal of addressing social isolation.

## Project #2: September – December 2018

The SEED Community Food Project runs community programs and advocacy to address the causes and effects of food insecurity in Guelph. In 2018, the SEED was exploring ways to utilize food that would otherwise have been wasted with an idea for a café, catering and food product business - the concept was called the Upcycle Kitchen. Two students (a nutritionist and a social psychologist) were selected to work with the SEED. Together, they conducted market research, prototyped a first product (tomato sauce), forged partnerships with a local wholesaler and the University of Guelph Food Science Centre, created a promotional video and developed the first jar and labelling. The SEED aims to begin selling a first batch in Spring 2019.

# OUTCOMES

## Outcomes for Community Partners

The first iteration of the Sandbox showed promise but only partially achieved expectations. The students introduced a novel concept to the community partner, which the community partner found valuable. However, there was no vehicle to continue the project. (See "Lesson #2" below).

> *"I thought I had all the answers on smart cities. I presented the theoretical concept of smart cities to the students and let them explore freely. I imagined whatever they came up with would be an extension of what I had already thought of, but they went beyond."*
> -- Community Partner

With adaptations to the program design, the second iteration of the Sandbox has contributed significantly to the development of a community-owned social enterprise.

> *"We're light years ahead of where I think we would have been without the Sandbox. We know our first product is a tomato sauce, we know where it's coming from, and we have a plan for production and revisions to the recipe."*
> -- Community Partner)

## Knowledge Outcomes for Students

The Sandbox is an effective training for students who hadn't considered social entrepreneurship as a social change strategy. Students in the Sandbox participate in the Hub - an established and successful business incubator. Students in the Hub are already budding entrepreneurs, whereas the Sandbox recruits (and appeals to) students who did not consider themselves social entrepreneurs.

*Students felt that the program helped them to identify the impact of solutions; to develop a project / implementation / business plan; and to apply a sustainable mindset to a **great** or **very great extent**. Some students felt that the program helped them to define a problem; to develop creative and critical thinking skills; and to identify the importance of group dynamics and roles to **some extent**.*

*"I think that the most relevant piece of this program was the ideation and problem identification phasing, both at the beginning, and the end of the project."*
-- Student Participant

*"I'm not sure I would identify as an entrepreneur, but if I had an idea of my own, I think maybe I could take it forward. I see the process as step-by-step, more feasible."*
-- Student Participant

(Excerpts from the program evaluation)

While the design of the program reflects an integration of community engaged scholarship and social entrepreneurship, the program *curriculum* is weighted toward entrepreneurship. As one student participant commented, "I would hope to see more knowledge and skill-building workshops oriented towards social benefit and community engagement." The Sandbox curriculum will be modified to include more topics relevant to community engaged scholarship, for example topics related to community ownership, the commons, and the role of "expert" and "practitioner" knowledge in addressing community priorities.

# LESSONS LEARNED

## Lesson #1: There are opportunities for student teams earlier in the procurement process

The first round of the Civic Accelerator launched in May 2016. With strong applicants for each of the three challenges issued, it was apparent that student teams were unlikely to be competitive in a challenge-based procurement process. There was however, an opportunity to work with City departments further upstream, when there was more room for innovation and experimentation, and before the departments are ready to enter the formal procurement process. In September 2017, the first "Sandbox" launched linking a City challenge with a student team.

## Lesson #2: Linking to community organizations increases the sustainability and equity of projects

Three students were selected for the first round of the Sandbox. They applied individually, and while each brought significant skills, none had expertise in MESH networks. Student learning outcomes were strong, and the community partner (the City) valued the opportunity to explore novel applications for the technology, but intended outcomes were only partially met. In particular, the students did not prototype the solution and there wasn't a structure in place to further develop the concept after the program concluded.

> *"However, also expected that whatever solution they came up with would develop into a business model – this was not well discussed – Who will be the clients? What does implementation look like?"*
> -- Community Partner

Learning from the success of the Local Economic Development Lab at Simon Fraser University, the Sandbox was reoriented to pair students with community-owned and initiated ventures. The Upcycle Kitchen project provided a catalyst to a venture that was conceived by the SEED, is owned by the SEED (rather than individuals) and that the SEED continues to develop.

## Lesson #3: Linking principles of community engaged scholarship and social enterprise creates compelling opportunities for students to experience the realities of research-informed decision-making

By combining academic research with practitioners' experience and the dynamic realities of a high-impact organization, the Sandbox involves students in the process through which community partners test and implement elements of their scholarly work. The SEED needed to select products to prototype in order to advance the concept the Upcycle Kitchen. The students used consumer research ("customer discovery") to identify potential products, integrating this knowledge with the community partner's experience, and working together to adapt to what they learned as the idea was tested.

The Sandbox embodies an attempt to integrate community engaged scholarship and social enterprise.

*"The University of Guelph has been a leader in taking action, locally and nationally, to enable community-based research and community engaged learning. More recently, curriculum and programming on Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship are also gaining momentum on campus, **offering a critical moment to link and leverage these similarly oriented efforts to generate positive social outcomes.***

*when student learning experiences are **embedded within longer-term partnerships among university and community**, the benefits to community are far greater…*

*offering opportunities for **students to lead social change efforts, but in ways that consciously and strategically link student engagement to "community" defined needs**….*

***to opportunities for prototyping**, and to various forms of support and accredited learning"*

(From the original Civic Innovation Prize proposal)

# FUTURE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING GOALS

The next iteration of the Sandbox will take place during Summer 2019, providing an opportunity to refine and develop elements of the program. Agreed program development goals include exploring:

**1** Further integration of community engaged scholarship into the (social) enterprise *curriculum*, particularly reflections on the role of the University (and the community) in meeting community priorities

**2** Ways University land, space, insurance, capital, networks and purchasing power can support emerging ventures (in addition to research and teaching capacity)

**3** Strategies to increase equity in the selection of Sandbox projects and reduce barriers to participation

**4** How latent public procurement opportunities can be linked with new ventures owned by community and catalyzed by the Sandbox

Potential Sandbox projects are being identified through existing connections to the community. In addition, the Civic Accelerator is running in Guelph, London and Barrie over the next two years and will also be a source of projects.

Together, the Guelph Lab and John F Wood Centre are exploring ways to scale the program, including joint efforts to secure long term additional funding.

# APPENDIX 1: CIVIC INNOVATION PRIZE BUDGET

| Total Award | $10,000 | |
|---|---|---|
| Costs | | |
| Stipends paid to students* | $7030 | *To reduce barriers to participation, all student participants were offered stipends* |
| Enterprise Development Funds* | $834 | *Each project was offered $1000 to cover costs. Decisions about how to use the funds were taken together with the community partner. e.g., labels and jars for tomato sauce, professional services (graphic design of a label)* |
| Evaluation | $1586 | *Conducted Dec 2017, after the first project* |
| Indirect Costs | $550 | *"Overhead" charged by the University administration to cover indirect costs of the project including facility, administrative and service costs.* |
| Balance | $0 | |
| | | |
| * Stipends and project costs were matched equally by the John F Wood Centre. | | |