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**Nomination for
2021 SBAA Societal Impact Award**

Community Problem-Solving Challenge

Nominee

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Community Problem-Solving Challenge

The Community Problem Solving Challenge (CPSC) is a program to engage local youth in the development of entrepreneurial solutions to social and economic challenges impacting their community. As citizens, youth become engaged when they have a meaningful role in the discussions, decision-making, development, and implementation of solutions that impact their lives.

Currently CPSC program accepts Old Dominion University's Strome College of Business (SCB)'s ENACTUS club members and rising sophomores and juniors from schools from the Brooks Crossing neighborhood in the city of Newport News. We plan to expand the program to other schools because of requests from community and school leaders. Interested students submit an application that needs to be endorsed by their high-school principal to be eligible to participate. Participation is limited to a total of 15 students, ideally with equal representation from all high schools.

Program Specifics

The CPSC is comprised of three one-hour workshops, a reverse-pitch session, a team project, and a solution competition.

- Workshop topics: Social Entrepreneurship, Design Thinking, and Community Problem Solving. Participants receive a “meal stipend” for completing all the workshops.
- Reverse-pitch session: A one-hour event where community leaders “pitch” a community problem for which they are seeking a solution. Recent problems that were pitched include: the opioid crisis, mobility solutions for the elderly, and food deserts.
- Teams: A team is created for each problem, and students place themselves on the team that resonates with them the most. Members of the ODU Enactus club are assigned

to work with each team in a mentoring capacity. Teams have two weeks to prepare a “solution” to the community problem. The solutions are usually at a broad level and need additional resources for execution.

- Competition: Teams present their solutions in a pitch competition. Community leaders serve as judges and select the team they believe has done the best job researching and presenting their proposed solution.

Innovativeness and Uniqueness

- CPSC is the first program in our university that brings together business students, faculty, high school students and community leaders.
- CPSC is the first program in our university to expose undergraduate business students to ‘live’ socio-economic problems that are faced by the local community.
- CPSC is the first program in our university that involves undergraduate business students in mentoring high school students to develop entrepreneurial solutions to problems in their communities.
- CPSC is the first program in our university to invite community leaders to be part of a class project. The partnership helps community leaders draw attention to issues and challenges faced by them to a wider group of stakeholders — students, faculty, Dean, business leaders.

Societal Impact of the Program

We find that many students are often unaware of the range and scope of socio-economic problems faced by urban communities. CPSC exposes students to a broad spectrum of live socio-economic problems that community leaders are addressing. Connecting our students with high

school students from such communities helps develop empathy. Mentoring the high-school students allows our students to not only transfer the skills and knowledge they learned in the classroom but reinforce them. Overall, we believe the experience helps develop the next generation of entrepreneurial business leaders who will play a transformational role in addressing challenges facing their communities.

To collect evidence of the effectiveness of this activity, we have requested an independent entity — the ODU Social Science Research Center — to develop and conduct pre and post program surveys of participants. Results indicate that all students agreed/strongly agreed that, as a result of participating in the workshop, their knowledge of social entrepreneurship has improved. All students also agreed/strongly agreed that their understanding of the specific characteristics of a social entrepreneur, the key factors for successful social entrepreneurship, the goals of social entrepreneurship, the concept of Design Thinking, and the steps of the Design Thinking process have all improved.

Among Strome Students:

- greater awareness among the business school students about problems in the community
- development of leadership skills and empathy as they mentor high school students

Among High School students:

- sensitivity to problems in their communities
- self-empowerment as students learn that community challenges can be addressed entrepreneurially
- relationship with Strome College of Business students and faculty, with increased interest in attending college

Community Leaders:

- greater likelihood of addressing critical problems in the communities by forging partnerships with students, schools, and universities

The Community Problem Solving Challenge was launched in 2019. We have offered three sessions of the program with planned expansion this year to additional historically disadvantaged communities in our region. Funding provided by E. M. Kauffman Foundation Knowledge Challenge Grant to increase “Inclusion in Entrepreneurship Research” has allowed us to expand the offering.

Description of applicability and transferability to other institutions

This program initially began as a collaboration with a small systemically underserved region in Newport News, Virginia. The level of community, high school, university administration and student interest has been overwhelming. We are considering expanding to other regional cities in our area. In relation to the impact, the program itself is relatively inexpensive and simple. It is enabled by leveraging the strengths of the various ecosystem partners to benefit both the high school and university students. We welcome the opportunity to share and collaborate with others, for the benefit of their own students and underserved communities.