Innovate for Impact

Ignite ideas, spark change, transform the Kootenays.

POST SECONDARY PROGRAM IMPACT REPORT

2025-2026 Academic Year

BUILDING SKILLS.
CREATING OPPORTUNITY.
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY

Community Futures East Kootenay

IMPACT TOOLBOX

The Innovate for Impact program expanded opportunities for post-secondary students to apply their learning in real-world settings while contributing meaningful skills, ideas, and capacity to social enterprises and nonprofit organizations across the Kootenay region.

Through a combination of classroom learning, social enterprise education, pitch competitions, and hands-on consulting placements, students gained practical experience while helping local organizations innovate, solve problems, and strengthen their impact.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN THE CLASSROOM

Through a partnership with College of the Rockies, students in the MGMT 305 course received full access to the Impact Toolbox platform and completed the course with two certifications:

- How to Start a Successful Social Enterprise
- Storytelling for Social Enterprise

THE COURSE CULMINATED IN A PITCH COMPETITION IN APRIL 2026, WHERE 19 STUDENTS PRESENTED SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IDEAS TO A PANEL OF JUDGES.

Thanks to **$8,000 in prize funding f**rom the Economic Trust of the Southern Interior, students received financial support to help move their ventures from ideas toward implementation.

Top Prize for Social Impact — $4,000

Sara Cooper — Pani's Café
Pani's Café is designed to support Ukrainian women displaced by war by creating opportunities for connection, belonging, and economic participation through food and community space in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Second Place — $2,000

Sierra Blackwell — Village Bagel
Village Bagel is a social enterprise focused on providing employment, workplace education, and mentorship for young people aging out of the BC care system without supports.

Second Place — $2,000

Lexi Davis — Healthy Harvest
Healthy Harvest is a sustainable farming initiative designed to extend the growing season and provide year-round access to fresh greens for the Williams Lake community.

The competition demonstrated the ability of students to connect business concepts with real social and community challenges - and to develop innovative ideas with the potential for lasting impact.

STUDENT CONSULTANTS: **LEARNING BY DOING**

The 2026 Summer Student Consultancy program provided two Kootenay post-secondary students with 15-week consulting placements, while an additional post-secondary student worked with KORE on their ReHub program and social enterprise development.

Together, these students provided consulting support to seven nonprofit organizations across the Kootenay region. Their work included:

- Marketing and sales planning
- Business plan development
- Financial analysis of new products
- Competitor analysis
- Community event development
- Social media strategy
- Promotional and marketing assets

The result was a powerful exchange of value: students gained practical experience and entrepreneurial insight, while local organizations gained access to new skills, ideas, and capacity.

*THE RESULT WAS A **POWERFUL EXCHANGE OF VALUE:** STUDENTS GAINED PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INSIGHT, WHILE LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS GAINED ACCESS TO NEW SKILLS, IDEAS, AND CAPACITY.*

VOICES **FROM THE PROGRAM**

“The student consultancy program with CFEK is a brilliant way to introduce post-secondary students to organizations in the community. A real-world opportunity to demonstrate their skills and expand their network.”

~ Community Partner who worked with Student Consultants in Summer 2026

“This opportunity expanded what I thought I was capable of and pushed me to use skills I didn’t even realize I had. I learned how to juggle multiple projects at once, quickly understand unfamiliar projects, and complete meaningful work within two or three weeks before jumping into something completely new.”

~ Student Consultant

100% Positive Partner Feedback

The impact was clear in feedback from participating organizations:

- 100% were very satisfied with their experience working with student consultants.
- 100% said they would be interested in hosting another post-secondary student in the future.
- 100% said the students' recommendations, deliverables, and contributions were very valuable.

Why This Matters

The Student Consultancy program demonstrates what is possible when education, entrepreneurship, and community impact come together.

Students are not simply learning about business and social enterprise in the classroom - they are putting those skills into practice. At the same time, nonprofit organizations and social enterprises gain valuable capacity to test new ideas, solve challenges, and strengthen their operations.

This creates a cycle of impact: Students gain experience → organizations gain capacity → communities benefit from new ideas and innovation.

Beyond the immediate projects, the program:

- Brings new ideas and skills to local organizations
- Translates academic learning into real-world experience
- Builds stronger relationships between post-secondary institutions and the community
- Develops entrepreneurial confidence and problem-solving skills
- Strengthens the capacity of social enterprises and nonprofits across the Kootenay region
- Creates pathways for students to build professional networks and explore meaningful careers

OUTPUTS AT A GLANCE

19 students
pitched social enterprise ideas

2
student consultants completed 15-week placements

7
Kootenay-region nonprofit organizations received consulting support

$8000
awarded to help students advance their social enterprise ventures

100%
of participating organizations reported being very satisfied

100%
would consider hosting another student

100%
said student contributions were very valuable

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LOOKING **AHEAD**

The work throughout 2026 demonstrates the significant potential of investing in post-secondary students as contributors to community innovation - not just future employees.

By creating opportunities for students to learn, experiment, and contribute alongside local organizations, the Innovate for Impact initiative is helping build a stronger ecosystem of social enterprise, entrepreneurship, and community impact across the region.

The result is more than student learning. It is practical experience, stronger organizations, new ventures, and ideas that have the potential to create lasting social impact.

Community Futures East Kootenay

Community Futures East Kootenay (CFEK) is a non-profit that supports entrepreneurs and local development in BC's East Kootenay region. They offer business loans, training, and lead regional economic initiatives.

IMPACT TOOLBOX

Impact Toolbox (ITB) is a British Columbia-based social enterprise and registered charity that equips youth with the training and resources to turn their passion for social change into impactful and sustainable enterprises.