

# McGill Dobson Centre for Entrepreneurship

## Category:

Best Incubator, Accelerator, Equity

## Program/Fund Name:

McGill Dobson Centre for Entrepreneurship

## Corporate Name:

McGill Dobson Centre for Entrepreneurship

## Date of Creation:

1988-09-01

## Indications:

n/a

## Therapeutic Areas:

n/a

## FUND & SERVICE File Document upload:

[dobsonimpactreport2024en 1.pdf](#)

## History of the development of the fund / Incubators:

After graduating from McGill University in 1949, and following his successes in Canadian mutual funds, the late John Dobson established the John Dobson Foundation in 1986 to help educate the public with respect to the free enterprise system and entrepreneurial activities in Canada. The first and flagship activity of the foundation was the creation of the McGill Dobson Centre for Entrepreneurship to educate McGill students on entrepreneurship. Since then, the centre has established itself as the hub of entrepreneurial activity at McGill University and has supported thousands of ventures, steadily growing and offering programs along an enterprise's ideation, validation, and acceleration stages. In 2018, the Dobson Centre hosted its first Demo Day outside Montreal to export McGill innovations. By then, the Dobson Centre counted 400 active start-ups that cumulatively raised \$400M and created 6,000 jobs.

However, brilliant ideas from McGill students and professors, particularly in health sciences, often stayed at the conceptual stage, as the Centre only offered three general entrepreneurship programs. Although ranking as the top Canadian research university, McGill's innovation potential was still largely untapped due to limited targeted networking opportunities, a lack of personalized structured programs, and insufficient funding.

Five years ago, the Centre's new team led by Marie-Josée Lamothe, professor and seasoned business executive, set out with a bold ambition: to establish the McGill Dobson Centre for Entrepreneurship as a world-class hub where ideas ignite and drive meaningful change. Today, as we celebrate the remarkable achievements of 536 startups worldwide that cumulatively raised \$4.1B and created 12,000 new jobs, we also take a moment to reflect on how to continue our mission to build innovative companies with a purpose.

Since the change of leadership and restructuring of the centre in 2019, the Dobson has multiplied its offerings to provide 14 learning pathways spanning ideation to international fundraising and customized to different industries. Across the programs, the emphasis is on practical experiential learning and acquiring tangible tools drawing on a network of mentors from diverse backgrounds and geographies with 30+ years of experience.

Notably, the Life Sciences Entrepreneurship stream is a pioneering initiative in university ecosystems. Drawing on the latest trends in scientific commercialization and research sustainability, the program supports scientific researchers as they are introduced to the entrepreneurial mindset, build their business plans and launch successful ventures that grow into internationally marketable companies. In under three years, the program has secured financial support from the Government of Quebec and earned multiple international recognitions.

Recognizing that entrepreneurship thrives through collaboration, the Dobson Centre prioritizes building an inclusive, diverse, and impactful entrepreneurial ecosystem bridging public, private, and academic leaders. We ensure meaningful partnerships that created lasting synergies, whether by aligning investment theses with fundraising startups or by connecting founders with strategic stakeholders for piloting innovative solutions. Every connection that we facilitate has to be relevant for both sides and drive meaningful collaboration. By the end of 2024, the Dobson Centre strengthened its global influence, engaging with 143 investment firms and forging 228 ecosystem touchpoints across 25 countries.

## **History of the development of the fund / Incubators:**

McGill University has attracted some of the world's brightest young minds for over two centuries. Ranked among the top 30 universities worldwide (QS, 2026) and recognized

as the best medical research university in Canada (Maclean's, 2026), McGill remains dedicated to the transformative power of ideas and research excellence while committed to strengthening the translation of innovation stemming from its community to bring it to markets.

The McGill Dobson Centre for Entrepreneurship is the hub of entrepreneurship at McGill University, with the mission to teach, coach, and support innovators from all 11 faculties, 13 schools, and 35 research centres in building innovative companies with a purpose. The Dobson Centre proudly stands as a global leader in entrepreneurship, committed to fostering sustainable socio-economic impact both locally and globally. We accelerate the commercialization of emerging innovation and discovery through access to a wide network of resources, 14 specialized learning pathways, and mentorship opportunities. Our approach is tailored to every stage of the entrepreneurial journey, from ideation to fundraising, and customized to different industries.

Our comprehensive practice-focused methodology stems from the Dobson Centre's three core principles:

1) Sustaining entrepreneurial innovation during its pivotal seed fundraising phase: Our international Fundraising tours, in partnership with Investissement Québec, are designed to help Dobson start-ups raise capital for their businesses while exploring international markets and partnerships. Since its launch in 2019, the tour connected over 45 companies to a global ecosystem of investors, business experts, and government trade partners, driving the growth and expansion of Dobson start-ups. This year, 25 mature companies are exploring global markets by participating in industry conferences and hosted pitch networking events to raise funds while meeting potential commercialization partners in 9 cities across North America and Europe.

2) Providing increased support to ventures in health and sustainability: our mission is to support building innovative companies with a purpose across industries while addressing all 17 UN SDGs. With support from the Weston Family Foundation in sustainability, the Québec Ministry of Innovation and Economy, and the McGill University Health Centres in health, the Dobson Centre has developed hands-on personalized programs tailored to mentor aspiring change-makers in health and sustainability. Our partners are at the forefront of their domains, and with Dobson's globally leading methodology in entrepreneurship, we aim to bring disruptive innovations to markets for lasting positive change.

3) Cultivating global partnerships to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem that is inclusive, diverse, and purposeful: In health, active collaborations with MESH, the innovation incubator at Mass General Brigham & Harvard, the Digital Medical Hub at l'Hôtel-Dieu de Paris, and the London Institute for Healthcare Engineering at King's College London equip innovators with the expertise they need to turn scientific breakthroughs into impactful ventures worldwide.

## **HISTORY & FOCUS File Document upload:**

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## **How do you address your portfolio needs:**

Our comprehensive practice-focused methodology stems from the Dobson Centre's three core principles:

1) Sustaining entrepreneurial innovation during its pivotal seed fundraising phase, 2) Providing increased support to ventures in health and sustainability, and 3) Cultivating global partnerships to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem that is inclusive, diverse, and purposeful.

To do so, the Dobson Centre offers 14 learning pathways:

At the ideation stage, we offer 8-week programs to help innovators test the viability of their ideas across four streams: tech, health sciences, sustainability, and women entrepreneurs. In the validation stage, we provide 10-week programs focused on developing go-to-market strategies and validating product-market fit, enabling ventures to start, grow, and scale in the fields of technology, health, sustainability, and social innovations. At the acceleration stage, we offer a summer-long program where start-ups work full-time to become investment-ready in technology, life sciences, and sustainability. Additionally, our mentorship circle provides personalized support for start-ups navigating business growth challenges, leveraging insights from our distinguished group of business leaders. For fundraising, we conduct international fundraising tours across three sectors-technology, life sciences, and sustainability-covering over 12 cities globally.

Every innovation we support must serve a purpose. We emphasize ideas from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, aligning with the 17 UN SDGs, because we believe they contribute to global betterment. With a clear long-term vision, we have crafted two milestone-based streams:

- From Lab to Clinical Markets: Designed for those aiming to develop and market their innovations in a clinical setting by cultivating a scientific entrepreneurship mindset to diagnose, develop, and commercialize their solutions for clinical markets.
- From Lab to Venture: Tailored to teams looking to develop, launch, and scale their innovations as ventures by fostering an entrepreneurial mindset to progress from ideation and validation to acceleration and fundraising, transforming their innovations

into viable start-ups.

The impact of our programs in life sciences has been recognized by the provincial government, which selected the McGill Dobson Centre for Entrepreneurship for a \$1.5M grant over three years as part of the Quebec Life Sciences Strategy for 2020-2025. This funding aims to support organizations with expertise in nurturing young innovative companies in the life sciences.

### **Impact / Metrics to measure Success:**

N/A

### **Why your model is innovative, and/or how it will improve the human condition:**

The Dobson Centre is steadfast in its pursuit of a harmonious world, where entrepreneurship becomes a force for sustainable development and a model for a brighter tomorrow. Integral to our achievements is our focus on experiential and practical entrepreneurship as well as our extensive network of partners, whose close collaboration amplifies our efforts and enriches resources for start-ups. Our commitment to powering sustainable socio-economic development allows us to adapt and respond to the ever-changing landscape of innovation, entrepreneurial education, and international fundraising trends. Teaming up with campus-wide initiatives in research and development as well as collaborating with private and public entities such as venture capital firms and government bodies empowers us to harness brilliant McGill innovations, fund and refine prototypes, test them in real-world markets, and showcase exceptional companies on global stages.

With unwavering commitment and profound dedication to global betterment, this year marks a significant milestone as we systematically evaluate our contributions to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This reflection strengthens our resolve to advance and adapt, ensuring that our start-ups not only address the SDGs but also generate a lasting positive influence. By championing change-makers and innovators who bring positivity through practical, meaningful initiatives, we uphold ourselves and our start-ups to the highest standards, contributing to the collective effort towards a better world by 2030.

### **Please provide appropriate references (PubMed, Abstract, Website):**

Acknowledgements:

We are grateful for all our supportive private family offices in addition to the John Dobson Foundation, National Bank, the Weston Family Foundation, the Québec Ministry

of Economy and Innovation, Investissement Québec, and the Government of Canada Trade Commissioner Service.

Our campus partners are invaluable allies in the prototyping and development of cutting-edge innovation. In addition to McGill's 11 faculties, 13 schools, and 35 research centres, we want to acknowledge McGill Sustainability, the Mastercard Foundation, the Clinical Innovation Competition, Healthy Brains Healthy Lives, McGill Engine, and Building 21. We want to notable highlight our partners:

- The McGill Innovation Fund accelerates developing inventions and businesses through research funds.
- The McGill Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences is at the forefront of health innovation in the Life & Health Sciences field, with 35 research centres and institutes, and over 20 departments collaborating across disciplines.
- McGill University Health Centre is an academic health network, and one of the largest and most modern in North America, reaching over 63% of the province's landmass. It provides an extensive real- life clinical setting for validation and product-market fit.

Our international specialized partners are invaluable in our efforts to export McGill innovation. Thank you to the Mass General & Brigham Harvard incubator (Boston), the MESH incubator, with which our mature ventures are able to collaborate with in-person workshops in the renowned Mass General Brigham clinical setting to integrate their technologies. Gratitude to the Digital Medical Hub at l'Hôtel-Dieu (Paris), for cross-partnerships between French and McGill start-ups as well as our two clinical innovation ecosystems. Fostering partnerships both locally and globally, we champion innovators who are at the forefront of shaping a healthier tomorrow for everyone.