PROPOSAL FOR THE HARVARD LAW SCHOOL PUBLIC SERVICE VENTURE FUND

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Background
In the fall of 2009, Dean Martha Minow appointed a committee of Harvard Law School (HLS) Faculty and Senior Administrators\(^1\) to study how the Law School could further promote public service careers in light of an ever-changing legal landscape and a volatile legal job market.

Interest in careers in public service has been growing among Harvard Law School students and graduates in the last decade. Entry-level, even lateral, public service work had been hard to obtain even before this surge in interest and before the recent economic turmoil. However, as demand for public interest jobs went up, increasing competition for them, the number of jobs and fellowships did not grow proportionally. Then when the economic downturn occurred, the number of entry-level jobs and fellowships went down and, while students at Harvard Law School continued to do well in obtaining them, we acknowledged that the problem was one of not enough funding to meet unmet needs.

At the same time, we at HLS realized that changing times warranted ensuring that our students could adapt and develop new strategies to manage their careers and to identify and solve new and challenging social issues. Harvard Law School has a long history of producing “social entrepreneurs” – those who try to find creative approaches to the most pressing social justice issues – including some of the endorsers listed below\(^2\). It was our

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\(^1\) The Committee consisted of: Geoff Swift, Assistant Dean for Finance; Lisa Dealy, Assistant Dean for Pro Bono and Clinical Programs; Ken Lafler, Assistant Dean for Student Financial Services; Alexa Shabecoff, Assistant Dean for Public Service; and Professors Carol Steiker, Louis Kaplow and Wendy Jacobs.

\(^2\) Other Harvard Law School social entrepreneurs include: Jessica Neuwirth ’85, Founder of Equality Now; Jennifer Gordon ’92, Founder of the Workplace Project; Janet Benshoof ’72, Founder of the Center for Reproductive Rights and the Global Justice Center; Penda Hair ’78, Co-founder of the Advancement Project; Angie Littwin ’02, Reaching Out About Depression; and Adam Stofsky ’04, Founder of the Media Advocacy Project.
hope that any funding we distributed would be part of wider efforts to further foster a
spirit of entrepreneurship among HLS students and graduates, even if they were not the
recipients of any funds.

The Committee proposed and Dean Minow enthusiastically adopted a Harvard Law
School Public Service Venture Fund. The Fund will make at least $1 million dollars per
year in grants for fully-funded fellowships at existing organizations and seed grants for
social entrepreneurs. The fully-funded fellowships will allow HLS third year law
students and judicial clerks to create positions at existing organizations that are otherwise
financially unable to hire them. The seed grants will allow HLS 3Ls and recent graduates
to create new nonprofits, legal or non-legal, to address pressing needs they identify. The
first grants will not be awarded until April 2013 but, in the interim, HLS is setting up the
process for awards and is also launching a series of programs and initiatives designed to
inculcate a spirit of social entrepreneurship at Harvard Law School.

The HLS Public Service Venture Fund and its corollary efforts have four overlapping
goals:

1. Impact on the career of individual HLS students and graduates.
2. Impact in addressing the problem that the initiative is trying to solve.
3. Affecting the career choices of other students (i.e. having more of them join the
   public sector)
4. Creating sustainable NGOs, non-profits, or organizations.

**Endorsements:**

“This new fund is inspired by our students’ passion for justice,” said Harvard Law School
Dean Martha Minow. “It’s an investment that will pay dividends not only for our students
but also for the countless number of people whose lives they will touch during their
public service careers.”

Susan Butler Plum, Director of the Skadden Fellowship Foundation: “This project is
simply admirable and inspiring. Harvard Law School sets the national standard for public
interest advising and support, and this new approach will enable more graduating
students to do more kinds of critically important public service work than ever before.”

Alan Khazei ’86, Co-Founder and Director of City Year and Co-Founder and Director of
Be the Change: “In starting City Year, we wanted to make it an ordinary occurrence that
all young people would complete at least one year of public service. That program was
truly born at Harvard – it’s something we thought about as undergraduates, and then we
committed to making a reality after we graduated from Harvard Law School. Through
this new venture fund, Harvard Law is moving forward with an idea that I think is

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3 The Harvard Law School commitment is to fund $1 million per year but the hope is to raise money so that
the amount awarded can grow over the years.
absolutely necessary to this nation’s future success – we all need to invest as much as possible in the future of public service. I sincerely applaud Dean Minow and Harvard Law School for making this happen.”

Rebecca Onie ‘03, Founder and Director of Project Health and recipient of a 2009 MacArthur “Genius” Award: “The Law School’s new Public Service Venture Fund creates powerful incentives and opportunities for HLS students to become public service innovators at a time when our society needs them the most. As an alumna in the field of social entrepreneurship, I see everyday the need for a rich pipeline of new leaders who can identify our society's most pressing challenges and develop creative, effective solutions for those problems. This Fund breaks new ground in enabling HLS graduates to be great thinkers and contributors not only in traditional legal practice, but also in pursuing multi-disciplinary, unconventional pathways to achieve social justice.”

Ken Zimmerman ‘88, Pro Bono Partner at Lowenstein Sandler: “Harvard Law School is once again taking a critically important step to further the next generation of public service leaders. The challenges of public interest service, especially in these demanding times, require the highest level of skill, creativity, and entrepreneurship. Through this fund, the school is making it possible for its students to take on our society’s most significant challenges and reinforcing the school’s long-standing recognition of the importance of public service and public interest work.”

Alan Jenkins ‘89, Co-founder and Director of the Opportunity Agenda and former Director of the : “With this new venture fund, Harvard Law School is putting its money where its mouth is, giving talented new graduates the support they need to be imaginative and inspired new leaders. Having co-founded a public interest organization myself, I know how difficult it can be to put good ideas into practice. We need this fund at this critical time in our nation’s history – to help a rising generation of leaders pursue creative solutions to our society’s most dire problems.”

Challenges Facing the implementation of the Venture Fund and its goals

- Fostering an entrepreneurial spirit in law school which is typically designed
- Creating a selection process and assembling a selection committee that will be able to evaluate a wide range of proposals and not replicate existing organizations
- Helping sustain and guide organizations we do fund
- Measuring success

Time line for launch and related activities:

Summer 2010 – start laying ground work for future Venture Fund awards – guidelines for deciding about funding and process – through conference calls with the Venture Fund Advisory Committee as well as conversations with foundation and social entrepreneurship leaders.
Summer 2010 – begin exploration of ways to incorporate entrepreneurship into the curriculum – perhaps through the Problem Solving Workshop – and events at the school.

September 2010 - roll-out Venture Fund website

October 2010 - Further discussions on metrics and process for the Venture Fund.

October 27, 2010 - Venture Fund launch event: A Conversation Between Social Entrepreneurs

Spring 2011 - Implement series of panels and workshops on social entrepreneurship, including identifying issues, fundraising, board management.

Summer 2011 – Further refinement of metrics and awards process for Venture Fund. Planning for further curricular and co-curricular emphasis on entrepreneurial training.

Fall 2011 – 2012 - Develop Venture Fund Selection Committee and finalize selection process

Fall 2012 - Publicize Venture Fund selection process

Spring 2013 – Make first Venture Fund Awards

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A Conversation Between Social Entrepreneurs: How to Identify A Problem and Solve It: featuring Alan Khazei ’87, a longtime social entrepreneur who founded City Year and is Founder and CEO of Be the Change, Inc, and Brooke Richie ’04, who is in the early stages of social entrepreneurship as Founder and Executive Director of the Resilience Advocacy Project, who will discuss their experiences, challenges, and triumphs in their work. Both will offer their advice to aspiring social entrepreneurs on how to go about creating new solutions to today’s most difficult problems and how to start, run and grow organizations that can implement those solutions.