FWI Funding Statement

Name: M. Altaf Arain and Jason Brodeur
Faculty/Area: Faculty of Science – School of Geography and Earth Sciences
Project title: The Local Education and Action Resource Network on Climate Change (LEARN-CC)

Please summarize how the FWI funds have been spent:
Jon Farrow, a McMaster Arts and Science student, has been employed to develop, maintain and promote the LEARN-CC web site. Details of expenditures are given below. The majority of FWI funds have been used to fund Jon’s employment, alongside minimal other operational costs.

Salaries and benefits: Salary and benefits of Jon Farrow to work as summer intern from May to August, 2013. Jon was again hired for 10 hours per month from September 2013 to April 2014 for data archiving and to service and further improve the LEARN-CC web site.

Equipment: Annual fees and costs related to developing a LEARN-CC web site were required. These included a yearly subscription to the JotForm service, as well as a 2-year Weebly Starter site subscription, and a 3-year website domain registration, which was handled by the McMaster Science Media Lab.

Event Costs: The LEARN-CC initiative will be promoted at area high schools during the fall and winter 2013-2014 academic year. McMaster students involved in high school outreach activities will be reimbursed for their transportation costs.

Most of the funds have been spent on salary and benefits for Jon Farrow and to service the web site. Remaining funds will be spent to promote LEARN-CC at local high schools and among communities in the GTHA. We expect to exhaust all remaining funds by December 2014.

This project enabled us to establish working relationships with the City of Hamilton, Green Venture and other local organizations. It also enabled us to directly engage with community members who can now report climate change related actions and impacts via our website. City counselors and managers would be able to use this information for decision-making and planning purposes. This initiative has engaged participants from Geography & Earth Science, as well as Arts & Science, and is a combination of computer science, geography, and communications. Methodologies and advice were shared with the RAMP project (another FWI-funded initiative).

1. How has the project exposed students to new or emerging research?
Students are engaged in reporting climate impacts information as well as doing outreach activities. In the future, once more data has been collected; students will be actively involved in studies of these responses, to better understand local climate change actions, perceptions and impacts.

2. How has the project offered students an experience beyond traditional borders?

The project has highlighted the importance of informal community outreach. LEARN-CC acts as a gateway into climate change research that the McMaster Centre for Climate Change and its partners are involved with. The virtual nature of the project takes learning outside the classroom and into neighbourhoods. Users (both students and community members) will be able to connect with the issues of climate change actions and impacts because of the ease of access and the proximity of other users.

3. How has the project challenged the confines of existing programming and advanced new paradigms of research or education?

Whereas before, efforts to address climate change were disparate and largely unorganized, LEARN-CC now provides a clearinghouse for data and initiatives. New partnerships may be formed based on shared interests discovered through the mapped data. The technology and methods used to aggregate, organize and display this data serve as a strong example of using low-cost, low-maintenance systems to achieve high-impact outreach tools and activities. LEARN-CC provides a new tool to students and/or community to engage in collaborative research, teaching and community outreach.

4. How will the outcomes of the project be sustained or expanded?

We are collaborating with City of Hamilton and Green Venture, who will be responsible for the long-term operation, maintenance of the promotion of LEARN-CC to residents of Hamilton and surrounding areas. The McMaster Centre for Climate Change will also actively participate in these activities.

5. Please outline any barriers or challenges that may have prevented you from achieving some of your project goals.

We were able to achieve all the project goals. Ongoing challenges include considerations for long-term sustainability (which have been well-addressed), and continuing promotion of the tool to the greater public.
Project Summary:

The Local Education and Action Resource Network on Climate Change (LEARN-CC)

LEARN-CC is a web tool that allows members of the public to report both the actions they are taking to address climate change, as well as any local climate change impacts that they have observed. The objectives of LEARN-CC included to: (i) create a community-generated, geocoded database of climate change-related actions and impacts in Southern Ontario and beyond; (ii) encourage communities, businesses, and members of the public to take an interest in environmental and climate change issues; and, (iii) stimulate debate, encourage research, and promote actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Submissions for LEARN-CC can include images, which are displayed on an interactive map of the region (http://mapclimatechange.ca).

In order to develop LEAN-CC, online tools (such as Google Fusion Tables, JotForm survey, and Weebly website platform) were used. First, a beta site was created and after gathering feedback and preliminary submissions from partners and communicating with media outlets (McMaster Office of Public Relations, McMaster Daily News, the Silhouette), a formal web site was launched on June 24, 2013. Response to this initiative was overwhelming. On day one, 800 unique visitors visited the web site. On average, 75 people have been visiting the site per day since June 24. So far we have 91 climate change action submissions and 3 impact submissions. We have collected 50 images of actions and 2 of impacts. The LEARN-CC launch has been reported in media outlets such as CBC Hamilton podcast, the McMaster Daily News, the Silhouette, and on various other websites.

LEARN-CC will provides a continuously-expanding, live database of local climate related resources and actions. It is being used and will be used for novel collaborative research, teaching and community outreach opportunities. LEARN-CC is one of the key outreach projects of the McMaster Centre for Climate Change (MCCC). It helps in public education and awareness of climate change issues. It has also helped to develop partnerships with the City of Hamilton, the Hamilton Conservation Authority, the McMaster Office of Sustainability, and Ontario’s Climate Consortium for Research Action and Integration (CC-RAI).
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The project has highlighted the importance of informal community outreach. LEARN-CC acts as a gateway into the climate change research that the McMaster Centre for Climate Change and its partners are involved with. The virtual nature of the project takes learning outside the classroom and into neighbourhoods. Users (both students and community members) will be able to connect with the issues of climate change actions and impacts because of the ease of access and the proximity of other users.

In the future, we plan to continue updating and managing the website. We also plan to feature climate change actions in an Action of the Month blog, a monthly showcase for outstanding contributions. The City of Hamilton promoted LEARN CC in its annual Climate Change Action Month in October 2013. LEARN CC is also part of Climate Change Charter of the City of Hamilton. The project was an unqualified success and will provide a rich resource for future study and involvement.