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BE the Tipping Point

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This editorial describes an initiative to transform all of the world’s business schools very rapidly and inexpensively into major vehicles for dealing with the global unsustainability challenges of the 21st century. The initiative builds on many calls to transform business school teaching, research, and positive activism into major vehicles for solving those challenges.

We start by providing a brief bit of context—an appreciation of the boldness and innovativeness of a MacArthur Foundation initiative that began eight years ago and continues today. We then describe an initiative labeled “BE the Tipping Point” that was inspired by those MacArthur competitions and report the evolving status of this initiative. We hope readers will be inspired to create and lead their own new initiatives to mobilize the change-creating power of the world’s business schools, or perhaps join business school partners and organizations that are co-creating the BE the Tipping Point adventure—or, better yet, do both.

100 Million Dollars Toward Solving a Major Societal Problem

On June 2, 2016, the MacArthur Foundation announced a competition “to award a \$100 million grant for a single proposal designed to help solve a critical problem affecting people, places, or the planet” (<https://www.macfound.org/videos/100change>). Very similar competitions were announced in 2019 and 2024. This editorial begins with an appreciation of the creativity and boldness of all three MacArthur competitions and suggests what might have been their original meta-goal. It reports briefly on proposals submitted to the first two competitions and suggests how those proposals evolved into a new initiative similar in intent to, yet quite different in detail from, the first two—a new initiative that has a life of its own and which has also been submitted as a proposal in the 2024 MacArthur competition. This third initiative is currently labeled BE the Tipping Point (BEtp).

The team championing this third initiative is pursuing a change strategy that includes a series of essays, videos, YouTube presentations, social media communications, endorsements, and even this

editorial—all describing the initiative in various ways, with some doing so in considerable detail. The intent of these descriptions is to encourage readers to create their own initiatives similar in intent to the one described, to join it, or to do both, thereby catalyzing the purposeful transformation Sandra Waddock has been writing about for a number of years (Waddock, 2024).

While a proposal for the BEtp initiative has been submitted to the 2024 MacArthur Foundation 100&Change competition, the initiative will continue no matter how far the proposal related to it advances in the unfolding Foundation competition.

Now, for a little bit of history.

June 2, 2016

I continue, with apologies, on a personal note. While on a family vacation in Chatham, MA, I opened the *New York Times*—or maybe it was Google News—early in the morning of Thursday, June 2, 2016, and saw the announcement that the MacArthur Foundation was offering \$100 million for a project that would contribute to solving a major societal problem.

My reaction was immediate. “Brilliant,” I thought—the big payoff will not be what the “winner” does spending that one hundred million dollars on just one project. The big payoffs will come from many, many projects that are conceived boldly and creatively with the “out-of-the-box,” “no-shortage-of-money” thinking the competition calls for ... and which do not win the prize. The big payoffs will come, I thought, from many things that happen because—and only because—the MacArthur Foundation provoked us to think boldly and creatively about what we really want to do—solve some of the very significant problems our societies face with initiatives that become reality, even if the initial proposals do not win \$100 million.

I have no evidence to support my interpretation of the Foundation’s possible meta-goal, although this editorial does report on one 2016 project that did follow the path I envisaged ... and hoped for. An application in the 2016 competition led to a 2019 application which led, in turn, to a 2024 application—each with evolving content and players in the resulting proposals.

The 2016 application was cobbled together by a team that included Greg Ulferts (University of Detroit Mercy), Tina Facca-Miess (John Carroll University), and Robert Brancatelli (Fordham University) and submitted jointly by the International Association of Jesuit Business Schools (IAJBS) and the Colleagues in Jesuit Business Education. Not surprisingly, it was one of 1,903 applications that did not win the one hundred million dollars in that year's competition.

That application, however, morphed over the next three years into a 2019 application cobbled together by a small group that included James Weichert, a Fordham MBA, and Morgane Fritz, a faculty member of Excelsia Business School in LaRochelle, France. While that application again did not win the 100 million dollar prize, the small team that submitted it with the support of Fordham's president, Fr. Joseph McShane, stayed together, added a few new members, and now calls itself the Global Movement Initiative (GMI).

In mid-2024, four groups came together to submit an application for this year's competition. Stimulated by the opportunity to submit the 2024 application, the IAJBS, led by its president, Dayle Smit, committed itself to join GMI on a new application. The Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI), led by its founder, John North, followed next and inspired oikos International's president, Michael Winter, to become the fourth member of the emerging adventure now called BE the Tipping Point and to use the MacArthur application opportunity to help them in their on-going process of "making the BEtp initiative real."

The rest of this editorial describes what that initiative looks like at the time this editorial "goes to press," or I guess we should now start saying "goes into cyber-space."

Two Very Early Warnings for Readers

First, the BEtp is intended to be a co-created initiative at the very deepest level, with processes that evolve over and over and over again. So, what happens in mid-2025 may differ quite a bit from what is being written in mid-December of 2024. However, while the members of the BEtp teams do anticipate, and in fact hope, that the processes and details of BEtp will evolve rapidly over time, they do not expect the ultimate purpose of this initiative to change and are committed that it will not change. That ultimate purpose is to transform the world's business practices in ways that heal our broken planet as we produce, distribute, and consume the goods and services we need to flourish. And, frankly,

to transform ourselves in ways that heal the planet as we do our work and live our lives.

The members of the BEtp initiative believe that the transformation of what we teach and research in business schools—and in our positive activism—may be the best opportunity available to the world for bringing about the necessary changes in ourselves and our business practices. The BEtp initiative is grounded in that belief.

Second, it may be tempting to think that the BEtp initiative is aimed at training business school students to make a difference in 20, 30, or 40 years, if and when they reach upper-level positions in business and other organizations. BEtp may well do that, but that is not the intent. The intent is for business school students to contribute to creating a globally sustainable world now—while they are still students. They are making their contributions—as many are already doing—through their positive activism, and now also by being actively involved in co-creating, with faculty members, their courses, and even the processes for changing those courses. The BEtp team believes that the students' experience in doing these things *as* students will help them gain some of the skills and mindsets they need to continue to be agents for positive change throughout their careers and lives. The team also believes that student and alumni involvement will be critically important contributors to bringing about the necessary changes.

Overview of the Initiative

The BE the Tipping Point initiative is a co-created initiative to enroll 700—and then all other—business schools in transforming their teaching, some of their research, and their positive activism to be fully aligned with the need to create a sustainable/flourishing/regenerating world, and to do so very, very rapidly and very inexpensively, "for free."

This initiative has already started and is currently enrolling the first 100 schools. With shared development or "co-creation" of the processes for transforming teaching, some research, and positive activism at its very core, the initiative avoids the quagmire trap of attempting to change the curriculum of any business school by grounding itself in the right and obligation of every faculty member to align her or his teaching with the realities of the 21st century and with the need to conduct our businesses and our lives in ways that heal the only planet we have.

Co-creation. The first schools that join BEtp in late 2024 will play particularly important roles in creating processes of change that guide their own changes and approaches to be used by the schools that follow them in joining the initiative.

The initiative involves two sets of co-created processes: first, for enrolling the first 700 participating schools into the initiative, and second, for assisting and guiding those schools as they make the changes they are committed to making and then verifying the completion of those changes.

Enrolling schools. The initial version of the process for enrolling schools is described briefly in the following seven steps.

- 1) Broad public sharing of the initiative.
- 2) Identifying and verifying an initiator (“leader”) for a specific school.
- 3) Creating and building a BEtp team for that school.
- 4) Verifying team member commitment.
- 5) Doing it—making the changes happen.
- 6) Announcing the completion of the changes.
- 7) Scaling—enrolling and supporting two new schools in the initiative’s next cycle.

A more detailed description as well as diagrams are available at <https://grli.org/tipping-point>.

Changing courses. At the heart of the change process is the transformation of every business school course—for it to be grounded in the need to create a sustainable world. The word “grounded” is important. The initiative is not about embedding some sustainability content in many courses—ones that continue to teach students that the purpose of business is to maximize shareholder wealth and that the business-as-usual practices that are destroying the planet are just fine, thank you. It is about designing and teaching courses grounded in the need to create businesses and other organizations that serve all of humanity, not just a few privileged individuals.

The BEtp initiative includes a rich set of resources for changing courses. These include published stories by individuals who have already made the changes in

books devoted to this topic (Irwin et al, 2023; Fritz et al, 2025), syllabi and accompanying commentaries on courses aligned with the need for a sustainable world, free coaching from faculty members who have made these changes, videos devoted to these topics, and articles on the change process itself.

No cookie cutter. No cookie cutter is offered to dictate the process for making those changes or what a particular course should look like when it has been aligned with the need to create a sustainable world and the realities of the 21st century. As mentioned above, a rich collection of resources is available as part of the BEtp initiative, and these resources are also available, usually for free, to faculty, students, and others whose schools are not participating in this initiative.

Details of the Initiative and Questions that are Likely to Be Asked Frequently

Details. Details of the initiative and the two processes just described are available at <https://grli.org/tipping-point/#faq>. Those details include diagrams and elaborations of the first process—enrolling schools—including individual and team exercises that are part of the process.

For the second set of processes—actually making the changes in courses—the link also provides access to the growing collection of support materials that offer ways to contact potential coaches, recordings of earlier ZOOM open houses focusing on this initiative, and invitations to planned future ones. The link also provides access to a variety of currently emerging items and others that will come out of the co-creation process on which this initiative is grounded.

Research and publishing opportunities. The link also contains commentaries, examples, and guidance to help faculty members and students participating in the BEtp initiative publish articles, make conference presentations, and conduct workshops on their work. Currently, the most visible examples of these publishing opportunities are the growing numbers of articles in books and journals describing the experiences of faculty members and others who have successfully or unsuccessfully tried to change their courses.

A particularly exciting area for possible publications is research on ideas that bubble up almost spontaneously as faculty members, and perhaps students, attempt to change their courses. Questions about what changes we want to make and how we make them are natural

opportunities for creating publishable research initiatives. The most basic questions underlying the BEtp initiative and many others like it offer a lifetime of research opportunities: “How do we become the kinds of people who can live on this planet without destroying it?” “What will we feel like when we become those kinds of people?” “What will a truly sustainable for-profit business organization look like and how can we create such organizations?” and on and on—many lifetimes’ worth of exciting research and publishing opportunities.

FAQs. The link above will also feature conversations inspired by many logical and important questions. Hints at answers to some of those questions, in the possible voice of the BEtp members, might include the following:

Why do you insist that the changes be made in six months for free or even faster?

Four hints at an answer:

- 1) first, we need to act quickly because we do not have 20 or 30 years to make the changes we need to make;
- 2) second, because *it can be done* in six months for free, and when the early adopting schools show that six months for free is possible, enrolling the next 200 and then the next 400 schools will occur almost spontaneously;
- 3) third, it needs to be free because we need a process that can be done not just by the first 700 schools but eventually by all the world’s remaining business schools—quickly and for free; and
- 4) fourth, because we all know from our own lives and work (and from the quality revolution) that things we cannot do in six years we can often do in six months.

Gimme a break! How can you even think about changing a curriculum in six months? We all know what it’s like to try to change the curriculum!

One hint at an answer: we’re not talking about changing curricula; we’re talking about a re-engineered process that simply changes courses (and some research and positive activism). The re-engineered process finesses the entire curriculum-change morass ... and

that’s why we say, lightheartedly, that “in this re-engineered process, curriculum-change is a dirty word.”

Where do students fit in the co-creation processes?

We have too much to say about this very important question and cannot squeeze our answers into this editorial. But one hint at an answer: Everywhere! We have much to say on this topic. It’s all good and exciting stuff; readers are encouraged to visit <https://grli.org/tipping-point/#faq> or perhaps ask some of the oikos International team members who are part of the BEtp initiative.

What will you do with \$100 million if you actually win the MacArthur competition?

The beginning of an answer starts with the competition’s schedule for selecting a winning proposal and the allocation of funds. That schedule is an excellent fit for the enrollment and changes of the first participating BEtp business schools. During the “Project Development” phase from Summer to Fall 2025, the BEtp team, early participating schools, Foundation staff, and very possibly leading for-profit companies committed to creating a sustainable world can work collaboratively to co-create innovative and creative ways to use the funds *based upon the experiences of over 100 business schools* that will have completed their transformations and are coaching the next 200 schools that will have joined the process by then. The deployment of funds starting in Winter 2025 can be based on hard data about what works and does not work in the BEtp initiative and what logical next steps have been created by those schools.

How can we gain access to the resources you describe if our school does not join the BEtp initiative?

Readers are encouraged to visit <https://grli.org/tipping-point/#faq>.

This link will also offer conversations about aspects of this initiative that can be confusing because the initiative’s change process is considerably different from what many of us are used to in our attempts to change things in our own universities, and in part because its goals are different in some ways from the more traditional goals we are all accustomed to pursuing (maybe the Q&A should be titled *Frequently Confusing Aspects of This Initiative*).

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