**MSU Finance Committee Questions - OPIRG McMaster**

**Can you give us some more information on “Equipment for Student Rental”?**

OPIRG McMaster provides a variety of equipment for students to borrow in our activist resource library. This equipment includes a data projector, 2 button-makers, a flipchart, a staple-gun, a large coffee urn, a GoPro camera, and a bullhorn. The board would also like to purchase some new equipment for students, like a camera. In case Fall 2020 is the only semester online, we have set aside $750 for use in the Winter 2021 semester, as students will be able to access our activist resource library in-person. If the entire year is online, we are not setting aside funds for Equipment for Student Rental, since the equipment won’t be in use.

**When will the audited financials be released for the prior school year?**

There were delays in getting the paperwork together for the 2018-2019 audit, partly because of the staffing changes that happened in Fall 2019, and also because of COVID-19 creating a backlog of work for our auditor, B.D. Hawkins of Guelph. The board has just received the 2018-2019 audited statement and we will be reviewing it and submitting it to the university and the MSU this coming week. All the paperwork for the 2019-20 financial year (that ended in August 2020) has not yet been received from the University, including the Mosaic statement for August 2020. We hope to have our paperwork in order by the end of the month and submitted to a new auditor, as B.D. Hawkins is retiring. We are considering hiring Jonathan Kooiman of Hamilton.

**Who have been your donors, historically speaking?**

Individual community members who value and wish to support the work of OPIRG McMaster have made donations throughout the years. For example, in the winter term of 2020, A. Bagchi of Dundas made a donation to support a Climate Change discussion, one that particularly focused on the effects of melting glaciers in India. The large majority (69% in 2019) of our grand total revenue, however, comes in through the undergraduate student fee levy of $5.50. We also have a few community members (non-undergraduate students) who have opted-in through a sliding scale $10 membership fee.

**Where did the idea to create a book club come from? How does this further your mission?**

BIPOC authors and thinkers are rarely given space within academia, and students might not have had opportunities to explore texts about BIPOC experiences in their undergraduate schooling. Following the mass protests against racial injustice and police brutality in the United States and Canada that took place over the summer, we noticed that many individuals had initiated book clubs to explore these issues at greater depth, and wanted to encourage such book clubs on campus. While reading is not enough to fully engage in advocacy, OPIRG realizes that doing so is an important first step—and a step well-suited to our current remote learning paradigm.

Given that the semester is online and book clubs will be hosting events virtually, we thought it would be helpful to support student book clubs by paying for books and mailing them to the book club members. This way, physical location and financial means are not barriers to participating in a book club, and we will be able to support Black and Indigenous authors by purchasing texts from independent bookstores. In encouraging students to meet and discuss issues of anti-Black or anti-Indigenous racism, we will be furthering our mission by beginning important (and difficult) conversations, while directly supporting Black and Indigenous authors and content creators. Ultimately, we hope these discussions will foster the will to take tangible action on issues of racial injustice within students’ communities.

**How will you use your surplus in the coming years (considering a fully online school year)?**

OPIRG McMaster does not usually receive funds from the university until November of the school year, when opt-out numbers have been finalized and documentation has been verified. As such, we aim to be fiscally responsible and maintain some surplus in order to ensure that our programming and operations are not disrupted in the Fall while we await funds from the university. The surplus that carries forward is included under “Revenue” calculations for the following year and is then allocated throughout the budget. For instance, we distributed the approximate $30 000 surplus we had from the 2019-2020 year throughout our budget for 2020-2021. The surplus went towards increasing the number of Public Interest Projects we had, the Book Club Fund, our events/workshop fund, our community garden, and more. These give a good indication of how the board might wish to use any surplus money in coming years.

**What parts of your budget are sensitive to price and how will you accommodate for any fluctuations?**

The OPIRG McMaster board meets on a regular basis and we are prepared to review, assess and make the necessary adjustments to budget lines as the need arises. Components of our budget sensitive to price might include all funds related to the Public Interest Projects (their programming and how much they spend is up to them), postage (depends on where students are located for mailing), and the Book Club fund (depending on how many members the book club(s) have). However, we do not expect major fluctuations in expenses that we anticipate from one year to the next.

**For the activist skills workshop, who will be the facilitators that will receive an honorarium?**

In the upcoming weeks, the board will be consulting the Public Interest Project members to see what types of workshops would be most useful for them and the general student body this year. Specifically, we hope to invite a workshop facilitator to discuss strategies to organize social advocacy events in the online era. Providing honorariums is an important practice in equity and justice work, as workshop facilitators provide time and emotional labour when sharing their expertise with us. In the past, honorariums have been given for skilled facilitators to deliver the following workshops:

* Getting the Word Out: Publicity and Outreach with Alyssa Lai
* Volunteer Management with Deidre D-Lishus Walton
* Consensus Decision Making with Baghael Kaur or Leah Henderson
* Conflict Transformation with Danielle Boissoneau
* Poster Design using InDesign with Rebecca Arboly
* Setting Goals and Getting There with Robyn Ocean
* Project Management and Setting Goals with Jane Devries
* City Hall Roadtrip with City Councillors Matthew Green and Aidan Johnson
* Anti-Oppression with various facilitators (including the Equity and Inclusion Office, who offer the workshop free of charge)
* Public Speaking with Jamie Milay Kasiama
* The Art of Creative Collaboration with Rehana Tejpar

**Could you elaborate on how you arrived at the number $15K for the cost of the garden? How will this plan be realized in 5 years from now?**

The community garden is meant to be a space on the McMaster University campus for students to grow produce together and address food insecurity. Throughout August, we recruited a team of volunteers to take leadership on this project and plan its implementation. While it will take time to create an accurate budget and concrete plan to ensure the longevity of the garden, we drafted this budget as a guideline, based on similar projects that have taken place at other PIRGs:

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| Item | Cost ($) |
| Soil test | 30.00 |
| Compost | 350.00 |
| Irrigation system | 650.00 |
| Water timer | 60.00 |
| Fencing | 2,000.00 |
| Sign | 100.00 |
| Tools | 250.00 |
| Liability Insurance | 350.00 |
| Incidental Costs | 250.00 |
| Outreach/ PR | 100.00 |
| Part-time Student Gardener (Spring, Summer, Fall seasons) (cost x3 seasons) | 7,425.00 (16.50$ x 25 hrs x 18 weeks) |
| Land rental\* | 2,000.00 |
| Plants and upkeep costs (additions beyond initial garden) | 1435.00 |
| TOTAL | 15,000.00 |

*\*Please note that we have not finalized with McMaster University what the cost of the land will be, so this is a conservative estimate.*

**Last year’s surplus is $30K, but this year it is around $13K, what is driving the increase in expenses?**

In 2018-2019, the Board knew they would be entering a year of uncertainty with the Student Choice Initiative, the layoff of 3 long time staff members, and a referendum imposed by the MSU. As such, the Board felt it wise to set aside a sum of money to carry us through until 2020-21, given the uncertainties in our funding. This year, we feel more confident to move forward and implement programming/long-range plans and utilize some of our reserves. At the same time, we intend to continue being fiscally responsible in maintaining a surplus to tide us over, given that we can never entirely predict the number of online opt-outs in a year.

**Have you considered exiting the collective agreement of OPIRG and pursuing these initiatives on your own, free of the financial levy they take from the McMaster chapter?**

Any non-profit organization requires paid labour. OPIRG’s staff provide connections, knowledge, and skills that are valuable to fulfilling OPIRG's mandate, and without them we wouldn't be able to give students the support and opportunities that we do. OPIRG is also unique on the McMaster campus in that we connect students to the greater Hamilton community; for these reasons, it is important that we hire staff who are experienced activists and organizers in the city. In the same way that the MSU and SRA hire students to fulfill positions of part-time managers for services, OPIRG hires long-time Hamilton residents to further our mandate. To ensure a productive and equitable relationship with our employees, we are part of a collective agreement.

The purpose of our collective agreement is to establish an orderly collective bargaining relationship between the Employer and its Employees represented by the union; to define clearly the hours of work, rates of pay, and conditions of work; to provide for an amicable method of settling differences which may arise; to promote the mutual interest of the Employer and its Employees. In short, it provides for fair wages and safe work conditions – all of which, as individuals soon to enter the workplace, we would wish for ourselves. Furthermore, as an organization dedicated to social justice and equity, OPIRG McMaster believes in the labour rights movement and hope to provide fair working conditions for our staff. Our commitment to our collective agreement is an example of how OPIRG embodies the values we advocate for.

**If a staff/executive member of your organization needed to be reimbursed, who would sign the cheque?**

Cheques require two signatures. All cheques prepared by staff are reviewed and signed by the OPIRG Treasurer (Vikita Mehta) and our staff member (Shelley Porteous). It is worth noting that OPIRG McMaster has always exceeded the standards required by the university’s Financial Accountability Policy for Student Organizations. For instance, OPIRG has an accountant who reviews our financial statements regularly and has a third-party audit completed every year (these are measures required of organizations receiving over $400,000, while OPIRG received less than $100,000 in revenue during 2019-2020).