



Memo

From the office of...
Diversity Services

To: Members of the Student Representative Assembly (SRA)
From: Sofia Palma Florido, Diversity Services Director
Subject: Peer Support Proposal
Date: June 08, 2021

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Background

This past academic year, the Diversity Services Peer Support Task Force conducted a four-phase plan doing research and consulting with other Peer Support Services. This has led to a final proposed plan which implements advice and concerns raised by stakeholders, community partners, and students.

We have opted for not using a 1-on-1 peer support approach as the scope of Diversity Service wouldn't be able to appropriately meet the needs of those seeking a service as such. Instead, "community circles" will be our first and primary mode of peer support within the Service. Although more specific details about the target audiences of the community circles, we want for one to be a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) closed community circle and another to be Faith/Religion/Spirituality/Creed-based. These will operate for an hour every two weeks or bi-monthly.

This will require changes to the annual Service budget, with considerations for an increase in trainings, volunteer appreciation, and any in-person expenses.



Proposal

McMaster University

McMaster Student Union: Diversity Services

Term: 2021/2022

Peer Support Proposal

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LOGISTICS

Number of volunteers: 5

As the Diversity Services peer support program would be running for the first time in the 2021-2022 school year, the number of volunteers may change depending on the projected needs and demands of the community and executive team.

Community Events Coordinators: 2

Responsibilities involved in running and organizing peer support community circles will be delegated to the Community Events Coordinators and the Community and Events Planning Committee (CEP) volunteers. The changes to the Community Events Coordinators roles will be outlined in their job description. As well, to ensure that the Community Events Coordinators have the appropriate tools to fulfil their roles and responsibilities, adequate training, involving peer support training, will be provided after they are hired.

Some general responsibilities of the Community Events Coordinators pertaining to the community circles will include:

- Hiring and training of the peer support volunteers
- Supporting the CEP volunteers after a community circle
- Attending and helping facilitate the community circles
- Assigning shifts for CEP volunteers
- Planning volunteer appreciation events for volunteers
- Helping promote the MSU Diversity Services peer support community circles to the McMaster community

Model: Hybrid — Bi-Monthly Community Circles

Peer support will operate in the form of (bi-monthly) 1-hour community circles. Each of the community circles will be specifically open to a general identity/group focused on cultural and religious diversity.

Community Circles

Potential platforms to host the community circles include:

- Discord
 - Easier for people to remain confidential
- Zoom
 - Has live-captioning for improved accessibility

- Microsoft Teams
 - Has live-captioning for improved accessibility
- Booked MSU rooms in MUSC
 - In person only
- Bridges Cafe
 - In person only

At least one CEP volunteer should be available (and others depending on the size of the community circles) to help facilitate the conversations along with the Community Events Coordinator.

*The community circles are recommended to be an hour to prevent fatigue and to improve access.

BUDGET

Proposed Budget

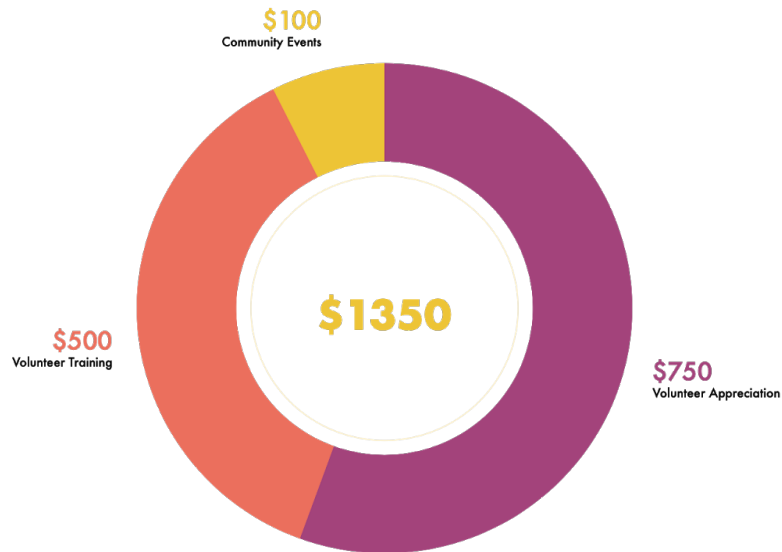
In efforts to devise an accurate budget plan for MSU Diversity Services' peer support program, the Peer Support planning task force consulted with four peer-support service providers at McMaster University — Pride Community Centre (PCC), Student Health Education Centre (SHEC), Women & Gender Equity Network (WGEN) and Maccess. The overall finding was that each service dedicates \$750 towards volunteer appreciation and \$500 towards volunteer training.

Volunteer appreciation can take the form of gift cards, t-shirts, social nights and many other tangible expressions of gratitude. \$750 is allocated to fund volunteer appreciation as it is a vital component of any peer support program. Under the circumstance of an online or hybrid school year, this budget also accounts for shipping and handling costs; however, we also have the option of sending virtual gift cards to reduce this expense.

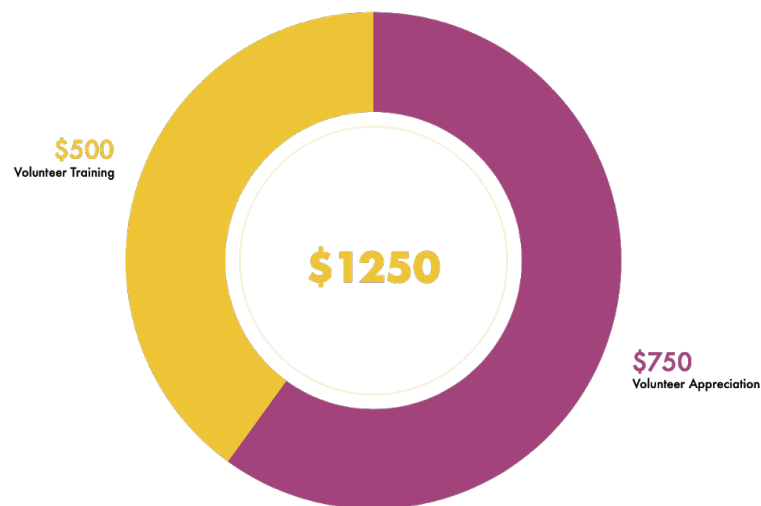
In addition, effective volunteer training is essential in ensuring that facilitators of community events have adequate resources and knowledge to fulfill their duties. Therefore, \$500 is allocated to fund volunteer training. If conducted in-person, the budget accounts for guest speakers, snacks, print material and space. If volunteer training is held online, the cost includes the fee for guest speakers and/or training material. An additional consideration with online training includes live captioning; however, this a free embedded feature within Microsoft Teams. Although, the accuracy of closed captioning may be improved with use of Otter.ai, a paid service.

Lastly, activity supplies, such as art supplies, are necessary when hosting in-person community events in order to ensure that the events are interactive and stimulating. As a result, \$100 should be allocated towards covering fees associated with in-person community events. To host said events, we will be using Bridges Cafe located on campus and the MSU rooms located in the McMaster University Student Centre (MUSC).

Peer Support Service — In-Person



Peer Support Service — Virtual



APPENDIX 1. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

Challenges with current services available:

(1) Accessibility

- Process of reaching out for mental health support is very formalized
 - o More awareness of specific resources on campus are needed (e.g., Elder in Residence, Indigenous counsellor)
 - o Fear/unknown of how one will be received by services
 - § Many students may NOT trust the MSU
 - o Understanding that no problem is too small

(2) Cultural/Social Competence

- Normal spaces for mental health support may not be conducive to cultural practices (e.g., smudging)
- Understand the unique challenges that may come with an identity (e.g., intergenerational trauma, anti-Black racism)
- Increased understanding of what mental health means for individuals of different cultural/ethnic backgrounds (e.g., for an Indigenous person, it is largely about connection)
 - o Groups are more diverse than is often accounted for (e.g., Indigenous is too broad, considering differences between Metis, First Nations, and Inuit)
 - § Increased need for volunteers to have awareness and education of cultures beyond their own
 - § If volunteers with a variety of identities is not achievable, then having specific training might be helpful – perhaps run from identity-based services
 - Be mindful of recruitment as MSU services recruitment can be very limited given current approaches (e.g., connect with other identity-based services, connect with groups during identity-specific events)
 - o Student populations are very diverse (e.g., mature learners, parents)
 - o BIPOC may be too restrictive, replacing with Black, Indigenous and racialized
- Student mental health is suffering due to **COVID-19**, increased burnouts
 - o Some individuals may have poor internet, so the service should be created with that in mind
 - § Using messaging services perhaps (e.g., Facebook)
 - § Being flexible and meeting students where they are
 - o McMaster is NOT doing enough for its students

Intentionality (In-scope/Out-of-scope):

- **Clear definitions** of what is within a volunteer's capability and when they should be referred to another individual/service (have a directory for this)
 - o How can we honour the work the volunteers are doing and support them if they are facing difficulties or need additional support => be honest and upfront about what the volunteer will get out of the process
 - o Maintain confidentiality or ask permission before connecting a student with someone else

§ Considerations of student autonomy?

- o Prevent a power dynamic
- o Increase **transparency** around what is peer support, what are community circles, who are the volunteers, and what training do the volunteers need to go through, when should we reach out, who can come to the service, confidentiality
- o Ensure the trainings make it clear that there is no identity policing