

WGEN Year Plan

2021–2022

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# Introduction

**MSU WGEN**

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# Vision for MSU WGEN

WGEN is a service for women, trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming folks, as well as all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Our vision for the service is to do justice to this mandate with the input of our executives, volunteers, and community. As the Director and Assistant Director, we have two main strategic goals this year to improve our service; however, as the year progresses, our vision will continue to expand and grow, especially as our executives fully transition into their roles and have the opportunity to establish their own goals as a part of WGEN.

One of our main goals for this year is to further focus on supporting survivors of gender-based and sexual violence. This has always been an important part of WGEN’s mandate, but we noticed it was not emphasized in previous years. To reach this goal, we will be running our Survivors community group during the summer and continuing it into the school year. We will also be looking into running education campaigns and some other stand-alone events (likely during Making Waves week). This will depend on our executive and volunteer interest. Additionally, we plan on running an event with Maccess on survivorship, trauma, and disability.

Our other main goal is to increase ease of access to WGEN. There are a number of areas we need to improve related to this goal, including decreasing the intimidation folks feel when accessing any of our services, giving folks the tools they feel they need to access our services and maintain inclusivity, as well as focusing more on accessibility (especially in our in-person space). To address the intimidation piece, we will be maximizing our promotions to put faces to WGEN, using training to further encourage openness in space facilitation, and running a survey to identify other factors that may prevent folks from accessing our space. In addition, the second piece is important to us, as having access to knowledge around anti-oppressive practices is a privilege and should not be something that prevents folks from accessing our space. We want to discourage the notion that potential space users need to have an extremely “in-depth” understanding of every social issue, but also give space users the tools they need to access the space while maintaining its safety. Finally, to increase the accessibility of our space, we will be consulting with Maccess to identify issues and come up with solutions.

In this year plan, we have provided an overview of all our anticipated activities for the year. We have identified areas we would like to change or improve with regards to certain activities, and the steps we will be taking to address these changes. However, some sections are intentionally vague, as we will be heavily incorporating the ideas of our executives and our Events team (specifically in regards to campaign weeks). Also, this list will expand as executives fully transition into their roles and have the ability to work on their own projects and provide input into our regular programming and strategic goals.

# Projects/Events

## Continuous Activities

**Peer Support**

WGEN offers a number of peer support options. Folks can access peer support by coming to the space and requesting it, or by emailing the WGEN email to set up a time to come in. Peer support is typically done by safe(r) space volunteers, or often the Director/Assistant Director. This year, peer support will definitely be offered online. If WGEN is able to operate partially in-person, folks will also have the option to request an in-person peer support session. In addition, we hope to decrease the formal and clinical perception that folks may have around peer support this year. Some ideas around this include “what to expect” type videos and improved information around peer support on our website.

**Safe(r) Space**

WGEN’s safe(r) space will run year-round. Last year, the safe(r) space first ran on Zoom and then transitioned to Discord. We would like to continue running it on Discord, as there are a number of factors, including Zoom-fatigue, increased accessibility, and more that make Discord a better option. However, because Discord has often been perceived as a niche site, we hope to use promotions to increase usability. For example, we might make a video explaining the benefits of Discord, guide on creating an account, and more, in order to increase its ease of use. In addition, we hope to increase space use this year. We will hopefully be running a survey to identify what barriers there may have been to folks who wanted to access our space, receive suggestions to improve inclusivity and openness, and encourage use by the communities we serve. Another idea we have had is to use promotions to put “faces to WGEN”. We would also like to give folks specific scenarios in training to reduce awkwardness when someone new comes into the space. We also hope to run events that give potential space users a safe environment to learn about what it means to exist in a safe(r) space and how to uphold that, so they don’t feel that they can’t access our space due to a perceived “lack” of knowledge.

**Resources Provision**

WGEN provides a number of physical resources in our space. Those services were put on hold due to the online year, but if the Director/Assistant Director/Resources Coordinator (at the very least) are able to access the space we will hopefully be able to resume this. We provide gender-affirming resources, including binders, packers, and breast forms; bras; condoms; and more. This year we hope to collaborate on gender-affirming resource distribution with the PCC, as WGEN and PCC do have partially overlapping mandates, and tend to reach a slightly different audience. Distributing resources together would allow us to get them to a larger scope of McMaster students. We would also like to increase use of our physical resources in general, as we have found in past years that they have been underutilized. We will do so by advertising them at our events and increasing promotions, as well as providing multiple ways for folks to request resources.

**Collective Care**

Collective Care is a collaborative program between SHEC and WGEN geared towards providing funds for students during the online year, given restrictions on providing physical resources. We hope to continue running Collective Care, as there are still a number of barriers when school operates totally in-person that prevent folks from accessing our physical resources. The Collective Care program was extremely popular last year. To continue it we will be seeking funding in collaboration with SHEC from a number of external sources.

**McMaster Womanists**

The McMaster Womanists are a working group under WGEN. They “strive to provide a safe, positive and inclusive space for Black women and nonbinary individuals on and off the McMaster campus.” In recent years the McMaster Womanists have not played a large role in WGEN’s activities, largely due to much of their leadership graduating. This year, we hope to hire a new exec team and resume much of the Womanists’ operations, including the Black & Gendered support group. Two of WGEN’s recently-hired execs will be working closely with the Womanists.

## Repeating Projects/Events

**Survivors**

Survivors is a bi-weekly community group open to all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. It is peer-support based, but facilitated by executives who identify as survivors. The only difference between facilitators and participants is that facilitators bring prompts/questions/topic ideas and have knowledge on other support for survivors that we can help them connect with if requested. This year, we will be running Survivors starting in the summer and continuing until the end of the year.

**Black & Gendered**

Black & Gendered is a support group run in collaboration with the McMaster Womanists. It is open to Black McMaster students and is focused on discussing the intersection of being Black and experiencing gender-based discrimination and violence. In recent years, the focus of this group has been on healing. We hope to continue Black & Gendered more consistently this year and will hopefully be able to do so after hiring a new exec team for the McMaster Womanists.

**Disability in Colour**

Disability in Colour is a support group co-facilitated by Maccess and WGEN. It began two years ago, and is geared towards creating space for disabled racialized folks. This year, we hope to run the group again, in collaboration with both Maccess and Diversity Services. We hope that the collaboration between three services will help us increase use of this group, as well as specific promotions that can ease intimidation.

**Community Care Groups**

The Community Care Groups are a new activity run by WGEN. We had three groups plus Black & Gendered. The groups were: Muslim women and non-binary folks, racialized non-cis folks, and East Asian diaspora and migrants. The groups are “closed spaces for folks to drop by, share experiences, and build connections with others who hold similar identities.” We hope to resume these groups again this year, pending Executive availability, and increase their use. We will do so through more specific promotions, explaining what folks can expect when they come to a group in order to ease any intimidation or formal perceptions.

**Newsletter**

The Newsletter is a new project we are hoping to run this year. This was suggested by our incoming executive member, Subin Park, as a way to promote our activities and share our advocacy resources. This project will tie in nicely with our goal of increasing access to knowledge around anti-oppressive practices and increase engagement with our service.

## Annual Projects/Events

**Transforming Mac**

Transforming Mac is a campaign week normally run during November, often to coincide with Trans Day of Remembrance on Nov. 20. It is a week specifically to support trans\* students at McMaster, consisting of some open but mostly closed events (i.e. closed to trans\* folks) to encourage community, resistance, and joy. Specific events and activities will be decided on closer to the campaign.

**Bodies are Dope**

Bodies are Dope is a week-long campaign week usually run in February. During this campaign, we run events for trans folks, racialized folks, and those who identify as fat. The goal of Bodies are Dope is to reclaim beauty, discuss oppressive beauty standards and structures, representation, and more. Given that Bodies are Dope is run during Black History Month, we also run a number of closed events for Black folks. Specific events and activities will be decided on closer to the campaign.

**Making Waves**

Making Waves is WGEN’s last campaign week, typically run during the month of March. It is described as a week of “intersectional feminist programming”, so we have the flexibility to run a wide variety of events related to this prompt. A specific focus this year will be running events for survivors. Specific events and activities will be decided on closer to the campaign.

## Other Projects/Events

**WGENius Trivia Night**

WGENius is our first event of the year and acts as an introduction to WGEN. We hope to use this event to introduce the services we provide and establish a sense of community among attendees. This is also the first event that the Events Committee will contribute to and will hopefully be a good way to transition them into their roles.

**Spooptacular**

Spooptacular is our Halloween event, where we have a themed intersectional feminist activity. This event has generally been used to build community and again introduce the services that WGEN provides to students. Again, it is the second event that the Events Committee will work on, and will hopefully serve as good preparation for them before working on larger campaign weeks.

**First Year Engagement**

We hope to further increase first year engagement with WGEN this year, in order to build community for these students from the beginning of their undergraduate career. This is a good way to encourage engagement with our WGEN community and events, as well as foster involvement with our volunteer and executive positions. We hope to run an introductory event during Welcome Week, either in conjunction with our Meet the Services event or separately.

**Meet the Services**

Meet the Services is a pilot event the peer support services will be running together to introduce our organizations and encourage engagement among first years specifically. Running this event in collaboration will allow students to identify which services they feel they fit in with best without having to attend many separate events. In addition, it fits our combined goal of increasing inter-service activities to focus on intersectionality and fulfill our anti-oppressive mandates to the best of our abilities.

# Project/Events Timeline

## Spring/Summer Term

* Executive hiring
* Transitioning executives into their roles
* Volunteer hiring (round 1)
* Planning
* Survivors support group
* Meet the Services

## Fall Term

* Volunteer hiring (round 2)
* Volunteer training
* Open the safe(r) space, start peer support
* WGENius Trivia Night
* Spooptacular
* Transforming Mac
* Support groups

## Winter Term

* Volunteer refresher training
* Safe(r) space, peer support
* Bodies are Dope
* Making Waves
* Support groups

# Finances & Equipment

## Budget Projection

The full budget breakdown has not yet been finalized, given that the budget plan is due on July 9th. However, we do not anticipate that the budget will be greatly different from the budgets from 2019-2020 or 2021-2022. In addition, as more details about a return to campus become available, some items in the budget may change slightly. As WGEN and SHEC attempt to continue our Collective Care program, we will also be seeking funds from external organizations. WGEN’s biggest costs typically come from the Underground, as well as costs associated with running events.

## Inventory

WGEN has a number of physical resources that we provide to students. We provide gender-affirming gear, including binders, breast forms, and packers. We have many packers but need to increase our supply of binders and breast forms. We have very many bras and need to encourage folks to access these. Finally, we will be ordering more menstrual products and condoms, as these are regularly accessed, if we can resume in-person operations.

# Promotions

## Service Webpage

This year we hope to increase the resources available on our service webpage. We hope to share more information around peer support, specifically to reduce misconceptions about what peer support means, and to share the many options folks have to access peer support (and support groups). We also would like to have a static feedback form for WGEN, and a resource request form for our physical resources (provided that we are able to access our in-person space).

## Social Media

We would like to use our social media to build community, which means creating more of a “human” component to our socials. Last year we found that engaging content was very successful, specifically one questionnaire we ran asking folks for their suggestions on which BIPOC music artists they liked. We also would like to put more faces to WGEN so that folks are able to see that we are a group of students, and not a faceless organization, which we think will help decrease intimidation. Ideas around social media will expand as we consult with our promo execs.

# Onboarding & Administration

## Hiring

**Executives**

Executive hiring took place during the month of May. WGEN received a very high number of applications for our executive team this year. Our team is now fully hired, and we are very excited about the talent and passion that all our executive members will be bringing to WGEN! The positions are:

* Training & Development Coordinator: Misha Ishtiaq
* Promotions Coordinators: Subin Park & Novera Shenin
* Logistics Coordinator: Megan Werger
* Community Events & Planning Coordinators: Olivia Crichton & Bethel Samson
* Social & Political Advocacy Coordinator: Chitrini Tandon
* Research Coordinator: Eden Wondmeneh
* Resources Coordinator: Rijaa Khan

**Volunteers**

WGEN hires both Safe(r) Space volunteers and an Events Committee. Both roles are hired in two rounds of hiring, one in July, and one in September. The Safe(r) Space team has anywhere from 40 to 50 volunteers, while the Events team has had from 10 to 15. Our first round of volunteer hiring will be opening in late June and open for 2 weeks. Group and individual interviews will be conducted by the Director, Assistant Director, and Training & Development Coordinator.

## Training

**Executives**

Executive training will be held during the summer, with flexible hours given that many executive members have varying schedules during this period. This training will cover specifics of WGEN’s mandate, past and continued activities, areas of growth for the service, administrative information (e.g.: reporting hierarchies, conflict resolution, access to the space, etc.), and various topics relating to WGEN’s anti-oppressive framework. Executive training will be held entirely online and will likely occur or be ready by late June to mid July. This training will be put together primarily by the Director and Assistant Director.

**Volunteers**

Safe(r) space and events committee volunteers are typically trained in September, alongside other MSU volunteers. Historically, training has spanned one full weekend. The first day encompasses all peer support services’ volunteers, and the second is closed to WGEN’s volunteers and covers all service-specific training, peer support scenarios, and more anti-oppressive content.

The timelines and planning for training will depend largely on the restrictions placed on WGEN’s in-person operations and decisions made about how we will operate. If we operate solely online, training will consist of both synchronous and asynchronous components to ensure full accessibility for all volunteers. If we operate based on a hybrid model, various options will be given to volunteers depending on whether they are continuing to attend school virtually or in-person. In this case, volunteers can receive their full training virtually, and choose to attend some in-person components if they would like.

This year, we hope that WGEN and other MSU peer support services can continue to collaborate on volunteer training, as this has been beneficial in the past.