



Association étudiante de l'Université McGill

Située sur les territoires traditionnels des collectivités Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.

Students' Society of McGill University

Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories.

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ETHICAL PARTNERSHIPS POLICY

Adopted by Legislative Council: 2023-04-06

Ratified by Board of Directors: 2023-05-11

Expires: 2028-05-01

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) acknowledges that McGill University is situated on the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee nations. The SSMU recognizes and respects these nations as the true and constant custodians of the lands and waters on which we meet today. Further, the SSMU commits to and respects the traditional laws and customs of these territories.

The SSMU would like to thank the Kanien'kehá:ka for their past and present stewardship over and protection of Tiohtià:ke (Montreal), and to express its solidarity with the vibrant Mohawk and other Indigenous communities that continue to thrive despite the ongoing settler-colonialism. The SSMU invites students and other community members to reflect on the historical injustices that make SSMU's activities on this land possible and to work to redress the injustices that continue to pervade our society and culture. We must go beyond land acknowledgements and work to dismantle the systems of colonial oppression and exploitation that we live under.

One way to "go beyond" in this way is to commit to only engaging in ethical partnerships. Before establishing a new partnership, the SSMU should consider the activities in which its potential partner is engaged to avoid complicity in oppressive practices, which include, but are not limited to, fossil fuel extraction, settler-colonial land theft, environmental destruction, policing and racial profiling. This land acknowledgement calls for SSMU's accountability on the choice of its partners regarding their actions and asks for a concrete response in the case of a transgression of its guiding principles.

Another essential aspect of ethical partnerships in regards to Indigenous solidarity is the partnerships with Indigenous actors themselves. Building ethical partnerships with Indigenous communities across Turtle Island and beyond should be considered within this policy as a concrete means to acknowledge and help their traditional responsibility towards this land. These partnerships should include participation from Indigenous stakeholders at all decisional steps of the process and be cognizant of



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the labor demanded from them. Relations of power resulting from colonization are still active and the SSMU should be careful not to entertain them through its partnerships.

1. Background

The SSMU is committed to ethical practices and leadership on campus and the broader community. This policy is introduced as there is currently no policy, voted on by the Legislative Council, that indicates how to navigate partnerships ethically, except for limited provisions in the Internal Regulations of Finance. It is the current Finance Committee mandate to conduct “an annual review of the Society’s investment portfolio to ensure that holdings are Socially Responsible within the definitions laid out in the Internal Regulations, Policies, Plans and Positions of the Society and delivering this report to the Legislative Council in public session.” However, this presumes that governance expertise lies within the Finance Committee and limits the scope of partnerships to investments. Recently, Students have come forward to express discontent with some of SSMU’s past and present partnerships that include through its banking institution, sponsorships, as well as some investments despite this preventive measure.

It is therefore necessary to provide further guidance to the various parties involved to ensure that SSMU’s governance documents are respected when engaging with partnerships. SSMU is currently in a governance gap when it comes to documents that pertain to partnerships. Indeed, while the past Sustainability Policy (expired in January 2023) called for the SSMU to be “stewards of students’ money in an ethical manner”, the policies it references have expired, notably the Ethical Investment Policy (expired in 2017).

Referring to internal guides when decisions are made about partnerships is inadequate when considering SSMU’s governing bodies and its role as a student union. Students deserve transparency when it comes to the various partnerships SSMU engages in while representing them, and should be able to assume that partnerships made between their student union and third parties are representative of the policies and positions adopted by its governing bodies.

2. Scope

2.1. The SSMU Policy on Ethical Partnership shall serve as a formal document to delineate the red and green zones for partnering with an external entity whether it be through banking, investment, sponsorship or else. This applies to partnerships made by SSMU, one of its departments, an Executive and shall strive to include in the future students groups. Currently, this policy’s scope does not extend to student groups.



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2.2. This policy shall strive towards inclusion of all current positions and policies in decisions that relate to partnership. To that end, this policy shall be reviewed once a year in March at the latest by the Vice-President (Finance) and the Vice-President (External Affairs) and amendments should be presented to the Legislative Council accordingly.

2.3. This policy shall not contradict any of SSMU's Governing Documents, including the Constitution, Internal Regulations, and other existing Policies and Plans.

2.3.1. This policy shall supersede any internal SSMU guides, in the case of contradiction.

2.4. If uncertainty arises and one is unsure if a partnership should be permitted based on this policy, they shall refer to the judgment of the Finance Committee who shall confer with in consultation with Executives, Commissioners, Members of the Society and Governing Bodies, recommend divestment from assets within the Society's investment portfolio not deemed Socially Responsible.

2.5. All SSMU members can bring their concerns about SSMU partnerships to the Finance Committee .

2.6. Sections 5.2 and 7.3 would be waived for the following fiscal year if SSMU has a deficit of more than \$200,000 at the end of the current year.

2.6.1. If a company violates this policy in a year where 5.2 and 7.3 is waived, the partnership signed between the company and SSMU must not exceed one year in length.

3. Types of Partnerships

3.1. Banking

Banking refers to the Financial Services provider that ensures the safe keeping of SSMU Financial Assets. It allows the SSMU to use the Transaction platforms such as paying bills, receiving cash. It allows us to adhere to strict financial compliance, such as the segregation of duties.

3.2. Investments

Amounts set aside by SSMU placed into a variety of Financial Instruments and Vehicules to Optimize returns (income).



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3.3. Sponsorships

Sponsorship refers to a business transaction between SSMU and a company/business in which financial assistance, products or services are provided and/or exchanged.

3.3.1. Monetary

Monetary sponsorship helps to support key events and various student-run activities and programs throughout the year by generating funding to offset some of the planning and logistical costs involved in hosting the events, initiatives or programs to their fullest potential, offering the most benefit to community members as possible.

3.3.2. In-kind

In-kind sponsorship is an agreement where external partners provide various goods and/ or services that benefit the community members directly in exchange for publicity, promotion and exposure for the partners.

4. The SSMU Context

4.1. Banking

4.1.1. Banking Institution

SSMU's current banking institution manages more than 300 accounts, one for SSMU's operating funds, and one for most clubs and services. For a total amount that varies from 10 to \$20 million dollars throughout the year.

4.1.2 Guaranteed Investment Certificates (GICs)

Not all money found in SSMU's operating fund is spent right away. SSMU therefore takes out GICs issued by its banking institution. GICs are investments with a guaranteed stable return rate (usually over 4%) over a specific period of time. The money associated with the GICs is used as a loan for the bank's other clients and SSMU gets a return from the interest rates. This return is estimated at around \$10,000 each year.



4.2. Investments

4.2.1. Investment Portfolio

The money SSMU invests comes from the investment portfolio portion of the Capital Expenditure Reserve Fund (CERF). Per SSMU's Internal regulation of Finance, the Investment Portfolio created in 2006 must always contain a minimum of \$2.5 millions. At the end of each year, the VP (Finance) and the General Manager determine the capital expenditure needs for the Society for the next Fiscal Year.

4.2.2. Investment Firm

The SSMU invests money with a third party, known as an Investment firm. It is in the SSMU's interest to enter into a flexible contract with the Investment firm so investments can be easily withdrawn if authorization is obtained per the Financial Internal Regulations. The Finance Committee reviews Investment Guidelines that are submitted to the investment firm to ensure that SSMU's investments comply with its governance document.

4.2.3. Socially Responsible Investments

The Society must constantly strive to act in the best interests of its Members. When it comes to investing money, the Society recognizes that this money belongs to the Members and thus shall ensure any investment in corporations or governments is in the best interests of the Members.

The Society shall avoid investing in companies and governments with material interests in:

- a. socially harmful areas (e.g. weapons and tobacco);
- b. human rights abuses (e.g. child/sweatshop labor and political oppression); and
- c. environmentally harmful areas (e.g. pollution and destruction of habitat).

Priority consideration shall be given to companies with a proven track record of:

- a. positive contributions to the environment;
- b. promotion of sound employment practices; and
- c. high standards of corporate governance and transparency.

The Internal Regulations of Finance ask that the Financial Ethics Review Committee be responsible for reviewing the investments of the Society. However, this committee has not met since 2017, and the mandate has since fallen to the Finance Committee.



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4.3. Sponsorships

The various opportunities for sponsorship with the SSMU include the following: digital media advertising and the Student Handbook, as well as events such as Activities Night, SSMU Awards, Grad Frosh, and any other events as requested.

4.3.1. The Student Handbook

Every year at the beginning of the fall Semester, the SSMU distributes a digital and print handbook to the incoming cohort and returning undergraduate students at McGill University. The handbook is the place where students can find all the information they need to know about McGill's campus, Montreal, and student life – it also includes an agenda with all the important dates a McGill student needs to know for the academic year.

The revenue from the advertising opportunities in the Student Handbook provides the necessary funding to be able to distribute the handbook at no cost to our community members.

4.3.2. Digital Media

There are various digital media advertising opportunities available to external partners that allow them to connect with our community; Social Media, SSMU Website, Digital Screens and Weekly Newsletter. Many of our sponsors will also offer our community members prizes for giveaways and contests on our digital platforms such as free tickets to concerts, sporting events, film screenings, etc. These posts currently generate some of the highest engagement from the community members on our digital media platforms.

4.3.3. Events & Initiatives

Sponsorship opportunities benefit various events and initiatives run by the SSMU, whether monetary or in-kind. Monetary sponsorship helps to offset certain logistical costs such as security, staff, set-up, administration, promotion, operations and any other associated costs.

In-kind partnerships are agreements that allow external partners to supply our events and initiatives with free goods, services and/ or discounts for event attendees or participants.

4.3.4. Student Group Sponsorship

Student clubs and services are at liberty to solicit for their own sponsorship to help run their projects, events and initiatives, whether monetary or in-kind. Monetary sponsorship helps in



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offsetting any planning and logistical costs involved, allowing the club or service to host their event, project or initiative to its fullest potential. Student club members or service beneficiaries benefit from in-kind donations in the following forms: discounts, goods and/ or services that are distributed directly to members and beneficiaries.

5. Framework

5.1. The SSMU's partnerships are meant to complement its services and activities. The choice, establishment, and maintenance of SSMU's partnerships should be anchored in at least one of the core principles outlined in its Constitution: Service, Representation and Leadership.

5.2. The SSMU shall strive to not establish partnerships with stakeholders who do not respect its positions. This includes, but is not limited to, the following red lines:

5.2.1. Any organization who participates in, or encourages, tar sands and fossil fuel extraction, whether as its primary source of profit or is top global funders of fossil fuels such as certain banks.

5.2.2. Organizations which do not respect the principle of Free and Prior Informed Consent on native land. According to this principle, recognized by the United Nations, no corporations may survey or utilize the land held by First Nations communities without legally binding, non-coerced permission.

5.2.3. Specific organizations that have been criticized by affected communities for enabling or profiting from settler-colonial land theft, war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

5.2.4. Organizations involved in environmental destruction, through activities such as the abusive exploitation of land and resources, pollution, or the degradation of biodiversity.

5.2.5. Organizations which exploit tenants and impede the fundamental right to clean, safe, affordable, and easily accessible housing.

5.2.6. Any organization which does not respect principles of ethics such as transparency, accountability, and integrity. Should a partnership contravene to the current Policy, the SSMU should seek proper accountability and reevaluate the partnership in accordance to its core principles and position.



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5.2.7. Any organization which fails to take accountability for situations in which discrimination happens, whether internally or externally, shall also be avoided.

5.2.8. Any organization who fails to address situations of sexual violence. A survivor-centric approach is also recommended.

5.2.9. Any organization which partakes in military activities, whether through research, or sale of services or goods.

5.2.10. Institutions through which systemic racism is not addressed, notably institutions of public safety such as the justice system and policing.

5.3. The SSMU shall strive to make its policies and positions apparent through its partnerships. Not only do partnerships provide a service or good to SSMU, but they also establish a relationship and demonstrate how the SSMU's resources are allocated. The SSMU should recognize its position of authority in the McGill undergraduate community and exert it with the following positions in mind:

5.3.1. Accessibility. The SSMU should encourage potential partnerships which have the capability to improve physical, social, and financial accessibility to services by its Members.

5.3.2. Affordable Student Housing. Through its partnerships, the SSMU strives to empower its Members through education, access to legal services, and work towards alternative housing models such as cooperative, public, and non-profit models.

5.3.3. Education. In the aim of increasing accessibility to quality post-secondary education, the SSMU's partnerships should work towards reducing barriers, especially financial, through acts such as the reinvestment of public funds in post-secondary education, paid internships, and advocacy among the provincial and federal governments for the removal of financial and social barriers to post-secondary education.

5.3.4. Environment and Environmental Sustainability. The SSMU should align its partnerships with principles of climate justice, meaning that the fight against the climate crisis should be led by the communities most affected. In this idea, not only should SSMU evaluate the socio-ecological sustainability of its partnerships, but it should actively seek partnerships whose mission is aligned with climate justice, both to support current efforts or to receive expertise on the matter.

5.3.5. Equity and Social Sustainability. The SSMU's partnerships should be in collaboration with organizations that aim to reduce the systemic barriers to historically excluded communities and dedicate resources specifically to counter said barriers.



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5.3.6. Family Care. The SSMU's partnerships should strive to alleviate the institutional barriers and discrimination which are often present for student parents, especially those with intersectional marginalized identities.

5.3.7. Freedom of Religion. This human right should be reflected and protected by the SSMU through its partnerships, namely by ensuring the safety of its students who display visible religious elements.

5.3.8. Gender Equity. The SSMU can take steps in its partnership to ensure the safety and well-being of its Members belonging to gender minorities, specifically gender non-conforming students. This is done by seeking partnerships with organizations which can provide gender-affirming services, and supporting organizations that do so.

5.3.9. Menstrual Justice. The SSMU's allyship role in promoting advocacy and operations surrounding menstrual justice can be achieved by supporting organizations which aim to educate and offer services around menstrual justice.

5.3.10. International Solidarity. The SSMU's partnerships should respect self-determination, diplomacy, and multilateral cooperation in matters of international relations. The SSMU should also actively support the preservation of the fundamental rights of migrants and displaced persons through its partnerships.

5.3.11. Research. The SSMU should encourage the democratization and accessibility of research results through its partnerships.

5.3.12. Sexual Violence. The SSMU should take an active role in supporting organizations which provide support to survivors and sexual violence and organizations which work in prevention.

5.3.13. Wellness. The SSMU's partnerships should contribute to the wellness of its Members, whether through services aimed at emotional, physical, occupational, social, spiritual, intellectual, environmental, or financial aspects.

6. Mandates

6.1. Finance

6.1.1. The Vice-President (Finance) shall amend the Investment Guidelines to reflect this policy and share it with SSMU's investment firm annually.



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6.1.2. The Vice-President (Finance) shall coordinate with the Sponsorship Coordinator to look at the financial effect of this policy on the budget and create a list of acceptable sponsorships to be pursued.

6.1.3. The Finance committee shall provide a report on the different banks available in Montreal for a possible change to the Legislative Council by the end of 2023.

6.2. Student Life

6.2.1. The Vice-President (Student Life) shall work to find ways to apply this policy to student groups, and shall present a revision of this policy by the end of the 2023-2024 academic year.

6.2.1.1 The Vice-President (Finance) shall work closely with the Accounting and Student Life and Operations teams to make sure those changes can be applied.

6.3. External Affairs

6.3.1. The Vice-President (External Affairs) shall support student mobilization that calls into question SSMU's banking institution, its investments or sponsorship due to contradiction with SSMU's governance documents.

6.3.2. The Vice-President (External Affairs) shall provide assistance to the Finance Committee when uncertainty arises to the legitimacy of a partnership in relation to this policy.

6.4. University Affairs and President

6.4.1. The VP (University Affairs) and the President shall coordinate with governance and equity commissioners a thorough training on matters of equity, social sustainability, and systemic discrimination to the Finance Committee at the first meeting of the Finance Committee every year or in advance of their duties under this policy.

7. Reporting and Accountability

7.1. The Sponsorship department (with the help of the Vice-President (Internal Affairs)) and the Finance department (with the help of the Vice-President (Finance)) shall produce quarterly reports to the Finance committee about new partnerships undertaken since the last report.

7.2. Shall any partnerships made by SSMU, one of its departments, an Executive or students groups violate the framework provided within this policy, the Finance Committee shall be a point of contact for any concerned member of the SSMU.



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7.3. The Finance Committee has the authority to recommend the refusal the renewal of a sponsorship contract if it judges that this contract goes against the policy, in which case they shall submit an official motion to that effect to the executive committee and board of directors that shall ratify the decision pending legal and financial consideration.

7.4. The Finance Committee is also able to review SSMU's relationship with its bank and investment firm, and can, if it judges adequate per this policy and after thorough research, submit a motion to the Legislative Council to put these parties on notice pending approval of the executive committee and the board of directors and after consultation and consider other institutions more representative of the Ethical Partnership Policy.

7.5. The Finance Committee is encouraged to invite relevant parties to discussions and considerations and shall consult with all relevant parties before making a decision as well as conduct a financial assessment.

7.6. As per its terms of reference, the Finance Committee is also able to "in consultation with Commissioners, Members of the Society and Governing Bodies, recommend divestment from assets within the Society's investment portfolio not deemed Socially Responsible."

7.7. The Vice-President (Finance) and Vice-President (External Affairs) shall also support the Finance Committee in including in their report on the annual review of the investment portfolio, a section on the implementation of this policy, on the progress made as well as report the problems encountered throughout the year.