

Constitution of the Union for Gender Empowerment

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PREAMBLE

MISSION STATEMENT

The Union for Gender Empowerment (UGE) is a feminist and trans positive organization that strives to provide services to marginalized peoples in a safe(r) space. This includes an intersectional anti-oppressive mandate that centers the following values:

- Anti-racism
- Anti-colonialism
- Anti-capitalist
- Anti-ableism
- Queer positive
- Harm reduction

BACKGROUND

The McGill Women's Union, which later became the Union for Gender Empowerment, was established at McGill University, which resides on Tioh'tia:ke, commonly known in English as Montreal and in Kanien'kehá:ka, the "Place of the People of the Flint" (the Kanien'kéha). The Kanien'kéha are members of the Rotinonshon:ni (Haudenosaunee) Confederacy. The Rotinonshon:ni consists of Six Nations: the Onöndowága (Seneca, the Keepers of the Western Door), the Gayogohó:no' (Cayuga), the Onöñda'gega' (Onondaga), the Onyota'a:ka (Oneida), the Kanien'kéha (Mohawk, the Keepers of the Eastern Door), and the Skarū'ren' (Tuscarora). The lands of the Rotinonshon:ni extended throughout much of what is colonially determined New York state, southern Quebec, and parts of southern Ontario. These lands, which were never ceded, were forcibly seized by white settlers, missionaries, police, armies, and the colonial state of Canada. Despite this, the Rotinonshon:ni still live in the area of McGill, with the Kanien'kéha communities of Kahnawake and Kanatasake closeby and many Rotinonshon:ni people living in Montreal as well, some of whom attend universities in the area. Thus, we in the Union for Gender Empowerment have a responsibility to fight for Rotinonshon:ni self-determination against ongoing American and Canadian colonialism.

Prior to 2002, only cis women, or women who were assigned female at birth, were allowed to become members of the Women's Union. In 2002, trans people, or people who identify at least partially with a gender other than that they were assigned at birth, were allowed to join the Women's Union, out of a stated desire to empower those who are oppressed by the gender binary, in which all people are assigned at birth into one of two genders which are stratified (men over women) and declared immutable. This policy was considered at the time to be discriminatory against trans men, or men who were assigned female at birth, given that they would need to out themselves upon receiving Women's Union membership, as cis men were not allowed in the Women's Union. As a result, the Women's Union changed its name to the Union for Gender Empowerment (UGE) in 2004, and the space became open to all genders. This reorganization was believed to promote a wider, more inclusive struggle against



gendered oppression. Despite the shift from the Women's Union to the UGE, numerous problems have limited the UGE's capacity to fight gender oppression as was intended. For example, the UGE collective has remained largely white, middle class, and non-disabled for the majority of its existence, and the collective has paid insufficient attention to issues of racism, colonialism, capitalism, and ableism in its gender advocacy. For this reason, in 2017, it was decided that the UGE should explicitly declare itself in its constitution an anti-racist, anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-ableist organization as well as a feminist and trans-positive organization. In addition, the UGE recognized its responsibility towards prioritizing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour), disabled people, and working class people in its organizing through real and concrete changes.

ARTICLE 1: Name

The Union for Gender Empowerment also hereafter referred to as the UGE.

ARTICLE 2: Mandate

We aim to provide services to any person who identifies with our anti-oppressive, feminist, and trans-positive principles, regardless of gender identity. The Union for Gender Empowerment provides resources, educational opportunities and a centre for advocacy. Resources include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A co-op selling alternative menstrual products, safer sex products, and gender empowerment items on a pay-what-you-can basis
- Referrals for health and legal issues
- Feminist, queer-positive and trans-positive resources at McGill and in the wider community
- A lending library of books, periodicals and zines focusing on gender and issues intersecting with gender
- A drop-in centre and lounge, an office with internet access
- When able, educational opportunities, such as workshops and action groups
- Act as a centre for gender advocacy by working as allies in solidarity with other organizations who share our values
- Taking on our own initiatives to actively address, educate on and challenge the enforcement of the gender binary

With these services in mind, we aim to ensure that all individuals in the space are treated with respect for their identity and background, including political and religious beliefs, and that they have equal access to the resources available. The collective strives to be an anti-oppressive organization that welcomes, but is not limited to, queer, Two-Spirit, transgender, intersex and genderqueer people. We work to ensure that our services are sensitive to survivors of gender-based violence, people of colour, Indigenous peoples, people with financial difficulties, people without status and people with disabilities. We do not support colonialism in any of its forms, both past and present, and act towards dismantling the colonialism that is still present in our society today. **In line with our anti-colonial mandate, we support the Boycott,**



Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, a non-violent movement protesting the humanitarian violations of the Israeli government towards Palestinian people. Our anti-colonial work extends from Tioh'tia:ke on Turtle Island across borders and seas. In accordance with the above stated goals, we seek to establish a collective that has a strong representation of people of colour and trans people.

ARTICLE 3: The Collective

3.1 - Collective Operations

3.1.1 The collective shall operate according to the following principles:

- Open collective
- Consensus-based decision making
- Non-hierarchical organization, with coordinators responsible for bottom-lining the activities of the organization

3.1.2 Three-fourths attendance of members necessary for quorum at collective meetings (if after two meetings quorum is not met, quorum is re-evaluated based on the number of members who attend). Rotating facilitators will be appointed at each meeting.

3.1.3 Committees will be organized on an ad-hoc basis to take care of particular needs as they arise (events, new initiatives, etc.) The collective will decide whether each ad-hoc committee should remain within the collective or be opened up to volunteers as well

3.2 - Requirements of Collective Members

Collective members shall be required to:

3.2.1 agreement to our mission statement

3.2.2 complete of staffer training

3.2.3 regular attendance of collective meeting when possible (maximum of missing one-quarter of meetings consecutively per semester with the understanding that the person will be responsible for catching up on the events of missed meetings)

3.2.4 Participate in a collective visioning to take place every 12-24 months

3.2.5 Participate actively and equally in maintenance tasks (such as meeting facilitation, agenda-building, etc.)

3.3 - Addition of Collective Members

Collective members shall be added via (consensus-based) approval by the existing collective based on the applicant meeting or demonstrating intention to meet all of the above requirements.



3.4 - Role of Coordinators

- 3.4.1 All coordinators will be members of the collective
- 3.4.2 Coordinators will act as bottom-liners for the different aspects of organizing (see coordinator positions) with the understanding that all collective members will participate actively in these responsibilities.
- 3.4.3 Coordinator positions may be occupied by multiple individuals simultaneously as needed.

3.5 - Removal of Collective Members

- 3.5.1 Should a Collective Member be the subject of a complaint under SSMU's Sexual and Psychological Harassment Policy, Equity Policy, Gendered and Sexual Violence Policy, or any policies which serve similar mandates, the coordinator shall be placed on administrative leave without pay until the complaint is resolved. If the Collective Member is not a paid Coordinator, they shall not be included in the affairs of the Collective.
- 3.5.2 Should a Collective Member, coordinator or not, miss one-quarter of meetings consecutively per semester without providing notice or have gone ten (10) business days without contacting the Collective (excluding academic breaks), they shall be considered to have resigned.
- 3.5.3 The process for permanent removal of Collective Members shall be as follows:
 - a) The body which decides upon the removal of the Collective Members shall be decided upon by the Human Resources subcommittee, composed of three (3) members of the Collective, at least one (1) paid Coordinator and one (1) volunteer Collective Member. The Human Resources subcommittee shall be decided by the Collective at the start of the academic year and is subject to change dependent upon fluctuations in employment.
 - b) Should a Collective Member fall into the situations designated by 3.5.1 or 3.5.2 the Human Resources subcommittee shall meet to discuss the situation within one (1) week.
 - c) The HR subcommittee will reach out to the subject of a removal request to request additional materials with no less than five (5) business days of notice. Within five (5) days of meeting, the HR subcommittee shall notify the SSMU VP (Student Life) of their decision and recommendation.

ARTICLE 4: Coordinator Roles

Coordinators will act as point persons and bottom-liners for collective activities. They will share the responsibilities related to these activities with the other members of the collective to whom they will *delegate* tasks. Facilitating collective meetings will be rotating responsibilities, and organizing and facilitating events will be the responsibility of the whole collective. All collective members should be aware of internal policy, including (but not limited to) this constitution. Additional coordinator positions may be created on a temporary basis to address situations of urgent need. In the event that a coordinator



position is vacant, its responsibilities will be distributed among other coordinators and collective members.

4.1 - Events Coordinator

The Events Coordinator shall:

- 4.1.1 Oversee and coordinate planning of all UGE events;
- 4.1.2 Support Education Coordinator in planning staffer training;
- 4.1.3 Work with outreach coordinator to use events to raise UGE profile on campus;
- 4.1.4 Find organizations to co-host collaborative events;
- 4.1.5 Ensure all events comply with SSMU regulations and are properly insured;
- 4.1.6 Manage events budget, deliver events budget reports to finance coordinator;
- 4.1.7 Publicize UGE events on social media, list-serv, and via direct outreach;
- 4.1.8 Take on further tasks as agreed by the collective.

4.2 - Administrative Coordinator

The Administrative Coordinator shall:

- 4.2.1 Manage any and all space issues, including supporting events in space booking;
- 4.2.2 Make agendas and take minutes for weekly collective meetings;
- 4.2.3 Ensure that UGE's stocks of beverages and snacks are maintained;
- 4.2.4 Take responsibility for institutional memory at the UGE;
- 4.2.5 Update the UGE Constitution and Mandate as needed;
- 4.2.6 Guide collective members and other coordinators in creating exit reports;
- 4.2.7 Support the collective in navigating SSMU and McGill bureaucracy;
- 4.2.8 Manage staffing volunteers;
- 4.2.9 Organize events for staffers in conjunction with the Events Coordinator;
- 4.2.10 Keep the volunteer contact list and groups up-to-date with current volunteers;
- 4.2.11 Provide support to new volunteers for issues and questions that arise during their staffing hours;
- 4.2.12 Communicate between the collective and the volunteer staffers regarding changes to the centre, staffing hours, or protocols, centre-wide events, collective meetings, and other information as needed, in conjunction with the Outreach Coordinator;
- 4.2.13 Manage a list of completed staffing hours each semester;
- 4.2.14 Support the collective in navigating SSMU and McGill bureaucracy;
- 4.2.15 Attend regular collective meetings;
- 4.2.16 Act as a signing officer;
- 4.2.17 Take on other duties as agreed by the collective.



4.3 - Outreach Coordinator

The Outreach Coordinator shall:

- 4.3.1 Print and disperse promotional materials regarding services and events;
- 4.3.2 Design promotional materials, if needed;
- 4.3.3 Attend or organize tabling events, such as Activities Night hosted by the SSMU;
- 4.3.4 Coordinate with the Education Coordinator to publicize trainings;
- 4.3.5 Send regular communications to UGE email lists;
- 4.3.6 Update and monitor the website and social media accounts;
- 4.3.7 Manage the UGE's correspondence by sorting emails/messages into designated folders for their appropriate staff member;
- 4.3.8 Answer emails related to external organizing, communications with the SSMU that are not finance related (unless in summer months), and media inquiries;
- 4.3.9 Negotiate and advocate on behalf of the UGE for issues pertaining to gender discrimination and gender empowerment within the SSMU, McGill, or Montreal context;
- 4.3.10 Coordinate campaigns for all SSMU referenda directly pertaining to the UGE;
- 4.3.11 Be listed on the SSMU executive list, act as a signing officer and take up responsibilities such as keys and access codes if necessary and possible (eg. requirements for McGill student status);
- 4.3.12 Work with SSMU VP Student Life on matters concerning the UGE's operations, mandate and services;
- 4.3.13 Sit on various on-campus committees as a representative of the UGE;
- 4.3.14 Communicate between the collective and the volunteer staffers regarding changes to the centre, staffing hours, or protocols, centre-wide events, collective meetings, and other information as needed, in conjunction with the Administrative Coordinator;
- 4.3.15 Publicize office hour schedules each week, as created by the Administrative Coordinator;
- 4.3.16 Collaborate with Education Coordinator in communicating with organizations and scheduling workshops for external and internal organizations;
- 4.3.17 Attend regular collective meetings;
- 4.3.18 Take on further tasks as assigned by the collective.

4.4 - Finance/Co-op Coordinator

The Finance/Co-op Coordinator shall:

- 4.5.1 Be responsible for keeping track of expenses, creating and maintaining the annual budget, and dealing with SSMU regarding all financial matters;
- 4.5.2 Attend the SSMU Services info sessions in the fall and any other SSMU financial and/or audit trainings;



- 4.5.3 Keep track of stipends and funding requests responsible for the upkeep of the products in the co-op, which includes ensuring that the co-op is stocked, paying suppliers and providing education on alternative menstrual products, gender empowerment items and safer sex products;
- 4.5.4 Take responsibility for ensuring the co-op is relevant to people's needs;
- 4.5.5 Attend regular collective meetings.

4.5 - Education Coordinator

The Education Coordinator shall:

- 4.6.1 Organize and run one staffer training each semester;
- 4.6.2 Conceptualize workshops based on the current needs of the population;
- 4.6.3 Facilitate workshops and presentations for external and internal organizations;
- 4.6.4 Collaborate with Outreach Coordinator in communicating with organizations and scheduling workshops for external and internal organizations;
- 4.6.5 Provide support to staffing volunteers who seek to develop their skills by including them into the facilitations of workshops at the coordinator's discretion;
- 4.6.6 Update the UGE Manual for the use of future staffers and collective members;
- 4.6.7 Attend regular collective meetings.

4.6 - Summer Coordinator

The Summer Coordinator shall:

- 4.6.1 Maintain a baseline level of service while McGill is not in regular session over the summer; make access to the library and co-op available by appointment;
- 4.6.2 Monitor all UGE correspondence and social media;
- 4.6.3 Consult remotely with collective in the event of urgent business;
- 4.6.4 Maintain lines of communication with SSMU and other relevant organizations over the summer

ARTICLE 5: Non-Member Participation

Non-members are welcome to attend and participate in collective meetings, but will not take part in the consensus-based decision-making process. Non-members can take part in open committees organized for particular actions, initiatives, etc. Based on capacity, general meetings will be held at least once a year for both members and non-members to check in with each other and give feedback; general meetings will act as a forum for ideas and development of the organization.



ARTICLE 6: Changes to the Constitution

Changes to the constitution and mission statement will be made based on consensus by collective members. Quorum requirements for a constitution change will be the three-fourths attendance of members; if after two meetings quorum is not met, quorum is re-evaluated based on the number of members who attend. Changes to the constitution must be ratified by SSMU as per their requirements.

ARTICLE 7: Finances

7.1 - Financial Ethics

All purchases under the UGE aim to be ethical and sustainable within consideration. Ethical purchases include refraining from purchasing items that come from sources which support any and all forms of colonialism and those with connections to authoritarian & oppressive administrations. Sustainability within the UGE seeks out the use of its finances in a manner which will have the least environmental impact and encourage sustainable social practices.

7.2 - Financial Procedures

7.2.1 Discretionary Fund Budget: The total amount of money or the Fund for one fiscal year will be decided when the Collective approves the budget in April of each year, to be no more than 10% of the UGE's total operating budget for the fiscal year. The Collective may decide during the course of the year to allocate more money (up to 10% of the UGE's total operating budget) to the discretionary fund if it is available and if the need is present.

7.2.2 Discretionary Fund Applications: Applications for discretionary funding will be made available on all of the UGE's public web pages. Additional advertising may be undertaken if the Collective identifies a need.

7.2.3 Review of Applications: The Finance/Co-Op Coordinator will review applications for completeness. If necessary information is missing, the Finance/Co-Op coordinator will contact the applicant to request the missing information. Upon receipt of a complete application, the Finance/Co-Op coordinator will bring it to the attention of the Collective at the next Collective meeting. The Collective will review the application according to the following criteria:

- Alignment with the UGE's mission statement and mandate
- Projected impact
- Demonstrated financial need
- Demonstrated financial feasibility

and decide by consensus whether funding will be awarded in full, in part, or not at all. The Collective may also, by consensus, elect to award funding conditionally, requiring



conditions, including but not limited to mention of the UGE in the promotion of the project and the submission of follow-up reports as the project progresses, in order to receive the award.

The Discretionary Funding Committee has discretion in prioritizing certain applications based on urgency and immediacy of their community impact.

7.2.4 Administration of Discretionary Funding: The Finance/Co-op Coordinator will advise the Collective as to the best method for the disbursement of funds, in consultation with the SSMU VP Finance if necessary. Within one week of the approval of an application, the Finance/Co-op Coordinator will inform applicants of the approval for funding, the amount awarded, the method by which the funds will be disbursed, and any conditions of funding. The Finance/Co-op Coordinator will liaise with recipients of discretionary funding to ensure they receive the funds awarded in a smooth and timely manner.

7.2.4.1 Discretionary Funding may not be dispersed to for-profit organizations and projects nor individuals. While discretionary funding may only be dispersed to organizations, they are not subject to limitation by size, official status, nor purpose, but are limited by locality and corporate status.

7.2.5 Other financial matters will be administered according to SSMU regulations and according to the principles of the UGE's mandate and mission statement.