

OVERVIEW

Student involvement in student organizations (including clubs and non-varsity sports) is a vital aspect of the campus experience and supports MIT's mission to develop "in each member of the MIT community the ability and passion to work wisely, creatively, and effectively for the betterment of humankind."

MIT's student activities landscape has grown to include over 550 recognized student organizations, placing pressure on the traditional systems of support. In order to better understand the current state and map a path forward, Chancellor Nobles and Vice Chancellor and Dean for Student Life Nelson charged the Student Organization Working Group (SOWG) to analyze strengths and consider areas for improvement in MIT's practices relating to student organization governance, financial management, space resources, membership policies, and risk management protocols. The working group developed a series of guiding principles for supporting student organizations as well as specific recommendations on three primary aspects of the charge: recognition, membership, and resource management. The full text of the charge is included in [Appendix A](#).

PROCESS OF REVIEW

Working Group Members & Structure. The SOWG convened in March of 2023 and met on a biweekly basis during 2023's spring and fall semesters, delivering these recommendations to Chancellor Nobles in spring 2024. The working group included faculty, staff, and student members and was co-convened by Professor Steven Hall, graduate student Ryan de Freitas Bart, and Vice Chancellor and Dean of Student Life Suzy Nelson. Some of the 19 group members participated in just one semester of meetings as detailed in the full membership list included in [Appendix B](#).

For each aspect of the charge, time was first spent on understanding the current landscape and best practices of our peer institutions as well as the processes and challenges in our own systems. More information about the benchmarking data may be found in [Appendix C](#) along with definitions of key terminology that are used throughout this report. Included in the appendix are definitions of roles within student organizations, which were collaboratively developed during the summer of 2023 based on the first phase of meetings and preliminary recommendations.

Student Engagement. As SOWG began its work, students were engaged to provide insight into the experiences of student organization members and leaders. Feedback was collected via a brief survey that was emailed to over 2,000 students through Engage as well as listening sessions. Several themes emerged, including: improved communication, greater transparency in funding, the value of non-student participants as mentors, as well as the need for simplifying processes relating to re-recognition. The working group used this feedback to better understand challenges for student leaders and key areas for improvement.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Prioritize student leadership, learning, and exploration

- a. Student organizations offer members opportunities for leadership, learning, and exploration. These recommendations aim to help students form and lead recognized student organizations, plan programs and events, participate in events, and manage resources and risks associated with group activities.

2. Division of Student Life (DSL) Finance and Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement (SOLE) work in partnership with student governing boards to oversee financial and on-campus space resources for student organizations

- a. SOLE will support and partner with the Association of Student Activities (ASA), Undergraduate Association (UA), and Graduate Student Council (GSC) on managing campus space and financial resources. Accordingly, leaders of student organizations are stewards of MIT's resources and, as such, are expected to align their activities with MIT's risk management, fiscal responsibility, space utilization, health and safety expectations, and policies and protocols.
- b. To assist student leaders in planning their programs and activities, SOLE and the student governing boards should create user-friendly financial and space management processes that are communicated with transparency and that allow for equitable and timely distribution of funding and space to student organizations.
- c. Recognized student groups should have priority for activity and office space (e.g., the Student Center).

3. Student organizations have privileges and responsibilities

- a. ASA recognition privileges include the ability to reserve space on campus, host events and activities, request funding from the Student Organization Funding Board, fundraise for their group, receive advice from SOLE and DSL, and use MIT's name and graphic identity according to Institute use-of-name guidelines.
- b. ASA recognition responsibilities include participating in annual registration, completing required officer and member training, following MIT policies, and managing group business and activities according to the organization's bylaws and MIT risk management expectations.

4. Support non-student participants in student organizations

- a. While the vast majority of individuals in a student organization should be currently enrolled students, having some non-student participants (e.g., alumni, MIT employees and partners, non-MIT affiliates) can enrich the student experience through coaching, mentoring, or assisting students in planning club activities. Organizations with non-student participants may require additional risk management measures and staff advising.
- b. Support from ASA and SOLE to majority non-student organizations should be limited. In rare instances when a student organization includes a majority of non-students, that organization should not be eligible for funding, nor should the organization be prioritized for student organization or campus space. SOLE should help transition that organization to a more appropriate DLC or entity.

5. Facilitate affiliations with DLCs or external entities

- a. For student organizations that are affiliated with a DLC or external entity (such as a national chapter), SOLE should work with that DLC or entity until all preconditions are met before group recognition by ASA is considered.
- b. Fraternities, Sororities, and Independent Living Groups (FSILGs) are recognized through the Fraternity Sorority, and Independent Living Group Office and their respective governing council, and do not participate in the ASA recognition process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognition

1. **Annual registration for existing recognized student organizations.** SOLE, with assistance from ASA, should require existing student organizations to register by a certain date each year, which is communicated well in advance.
 - a. Registration criteria includes the names of at least five currently enrolled student members (including officers), the officers' contact information (e.g., a mailing list), a description of the group's general mission, membership criteria, and a roster of non-student participants.
 - b. Only currently enrolled MIT students are eligible to hold leadership positions.
 - c. Non-student involvement in student organizations and activities may require organizations to undergo additional training and advising or follow supplementary risk mitigation procedures. This may be an incentive for organizations to commit to being student-only.
 - d. SOLE should regularly update and post online a roster of recognized and registered organizations in good standing for ease of access by key stakeholders (e.g., all students, GSC, UA, CAC, Registrar, DLC, or external entity). An abbreviated version of this list consisting of group names and contact emails should be made accessible to all MIT students to facilitate discovering groups.
 - e. Access to MIT funding and space reservations should be restricted until student organizations complete the registration process.
2. **Student organization classification.** SOLE, with input from ASA, should create a taxonomy of recognized student organizations by mission and goals, types of activities, parent organization affiliation, and membership criteria.
 - a. Student organizations should identify the classification or category with which the group identifies as part of the registration/recognition process.
 - b. SOLE should track affiliation with a DLC or external entity that may have implications for that group's risk management protocols and access to funding.
 - c. The taxonomy should differentiate between groups with or without non-student participation.
3. **Regular evaluation of existing recognized student organizations.** ASA, with assistance from SOLE, will develop a process for regularly evaluating student organizations, looking at an organization's merits, uniqueness, viability, and areas for improvement. Groups needing help with operations or activities will work with ASA and SOLE to develop an improvement plan.
4. **Derecognition.** A group should be derecognized if it fails to be viable and does not meet MIT's standards and criteria for student organization recognition described in the [ASA Recognition Procedures](#).
 - a. For groups that are no longer recognized, SOLE, with the help of ASA, should develop a process to cancel space reservations, event approvals, and organization space assignments; to manage organizational property; to update SOLE's list of MIT-recognized groups and websites; to restrict MIT-sponsored access and access to MIT financial accounts; and to help preserve the group's history and records.
 - b. SOLE, with the help of ASA, should establish a process to reinstate a group that has been previously derecognized.

- c. The Committee on Discipline (COD) is responsible for resolving complaints of alleged misconduct against students and student organizations. Additional information at <https://cod.mit.edu/committee-discipline>, <http://cod.mit.edu/rules/section1>, and <https://facultygovernance.mit.edu/committee/committee-discipline>.
5. **Recognizing new student organizations.** ASA, with input from SOLE, should identify criteria and deadlines for forming a new student organization.
- a. Recognition criteria should include: 1) a slate of at least five interested currently enrolled students; 2) a written mission and goals that are not redundant to an existing recognized student organization or a justification for why this new student organization fills a gap that is not being met; and 3) a draft budget, and an agreement to follow the Institute's policies and procedures.
 - b. New student organizations should receive provisional recognition, making the group eligible for limited funding, space access, and use of MIT's name and graphic identity per use-of-name policies. This will allow the student organization to recruit members, participate in trainings, access advising resources, and plan events. Full recognition should be automatically granted once the student organization has remained in good standing for a standard period (e.g., six months) and has maintained all other policy, programming, and membership requirements.
 - c. SOLE has the final review and approval of new organizations and may: 1) approve recognition; 2) seek clarification or modification of a new student organization's petition for recognition; 3) defer the application for one recognition cycle and suggest areas for change or improvement in the application; or 4) deny recognition for one or more of the following reasons: risk management or safety concerns (based on guidance from the Office of General Counsel or Environment, Health, and Safety), lack of endorsement by an appropriate sponsor (if required), or failure to adhere to the new student organization recognition criteria, policy and protocols as codified in the Student Organization Handbook and *Mind and Hand Book*.
 - 1. Should SOLE and ASA disagree, they should seek guidance toward a resolution from the vice chancellor and dean for student life.
 - d. In the unlikely event that MIT-provided advising, financial, or space resources become overextended, ASA and SOLE should jointly have the authority to pause new group recognition and defer requests until appropriate resources become available.
6. **Advising, trainings, and leadership opportunities**
- a. SOLE should regularly convene student organization advisors to review MIT's policies and expectations and to improve student organization oversight.
 - 1. Student organizations should provide their advisor's name and contact information during annual registration, which will be published in the roster of active groups.
 - b. With input from ASA, SOLE should create a series of brief, online student officer and member training modules on topics such as goal setting, financial planning (e.g., how to file an RFP), anti-hazing and anti-discrimination policies and related agreements, social-host expectations and event planning, and effective risk management practices.
 - 1. Officer and member training requirements and deadlines should be communicated well in advance. SOLE should track fulfillment of training requirements and signed anti-hazing and anti-discrimination agreements.

2. SOLE should provide incentives for completing trainings on time. Groups failing to complete these or other requirements may have their access to funding and space restricted.
- c. Encourage participation in leadership conferences and retreats. Leadership conferences should also include training on required topics that fulfills criteria for existing group registration or new group recognition.

Membership

1. **Define group roles.** In partnership with ASA, SOLE should define roles and expectations for members, officers, participants, advisors, and attendees.¹
 - a. SOLE should develop best practices for managing risks associated with non-student participants in student organizations (e.g., participation agreements, background checks, additional training, reporting requirements, code of conduct agreements, liability waivers).
 - i. ASA, in partnership with SOLE, should consider establishing a process for collecting fees from non-student participants and criteria for determining if they must undergo background checks (at their expense) prior to participation. SOLE should develop a process for managing these background checks.
 - ii. Non-student participants should annually attest to uphold a statement of expectations, compliance with MIT policies, and a conduct agreement that includes a “one-strike” policy for violations.
 - b. Organizations with a majority of non-student participants should not qualify for funding or SOLE advising, nor should the ASA recognize these groups. Such groups should seek alternate avenues for recognition and funding such as the Alumni Association or another DLC.

Resource Management

1. **Create a single student organization funding board.** SOLE and DSL Finance should work with the ASA, UA, and GSC to create one funding board that allows for increased efficiency and streamlines the processes for funding requests in alignment with MIT’s policies and procedures, regardless of the group’s mix of undergraduate and graduate student members.
 - a. The new funding board to allocate funds derived from the New Fund² sources (\$1,385,460), Large Event Fund (\$100,000), and ARCADE (\$50,000).
 - b. The Student Organization Funding Board and student governments must submit proposed operating budgets annually to SOLE and DSL Finance to verify compliance with MIT’s policies and procedures and to ensure appropriate stewardship of MIT resources. All other student organizations should submit annual funding requests to the Student Organization Funding Board.
 - c. The funding board should be composed of at least nine student representatives as well as non-voting SOLE and DSL Finance staff who will serve as advisors. The board should have graduate and undergraduate students,

¹ New definitions for roles within student organizations were developed collaboratively during the summer of 2023 based on the first phase of SOWG meetings and preliminary recommendations. The new role descriptions and definitions of key terminology are listed in Appendix C.

² FY2023-24 New Fund: \$1,385,460 (Student Life Fee: \$1,241,000, General Institute Budget: \$99,460, Undergraduate Ring Royalties: \$45,000)

equal representation from ASA, UA, GSC, and include at least three elected representatives from student organizations.

- i. The funding board should establish equitable distribution guidelines, including an explanation for how the funds will be used to benefit the MIT student community.
 1. As part of their application to the funding board, each ASA-recognized student organization should report spending patterns, revenue sources, and fund reserves.
 2. Club sports, FSILGs, and residence hall student governments can seek funding for events and programs open to all students, and they must include a report of their spending patterns, revenue sources, and fund reserves with their applications.
 3. Allocations from the funding board must prioritize benefitting currently enrolled MIT students.
 4. All organizations and events funded by the new funding board must be open to all currently enrolled MIT students without restriction or priority to certain populations.
 - d. Allocations from the funding board must be used in the same academic year they were allocated. An ASA-recognized student organization may carry forward funding that is derived from other sources, which may include but is not limited to fundraising, donations, or DLC sponsorship.
 - i. To inform the allocation process, DSL Finance and SOLE will provide the funding board with an annual analysis of student organization, residence hall, club sport, and FSILG spending patterns and reserve account balances. This information should help determine each group's annual reserve limit.
 - e. With DSL Finance and SOLE approval, student governing boards should be able to carry forward a portion of their end-of-year unspent balance for designated, appropriate use in the coming academic year.
- 2. Develop a continuous improvement process for student organization spending.** SOLE should continually strive to improve the funding process by:
- a. Encouraging reductions in groups' out-of-pocket spending, thus reducing the volume of Requests for Purchase (RFPs) submitted to and processed by SOLE.
 - b. Benchmarking with peer institutions to maintain best practices.
 - c. Reviewing and enhancing the student organization funding process annually.
- 3. Ensure well-maintained spaces for student co-curricular use and prioritize space allocation to groups and programs where the majority of members are students.**
- a. In partnership with Campus Planning and the Provost's Office, DSL should determine which campus spaces are appropriate for student co-curricular use.
 - b. Student co-curricular space should be utilized for legitimate activities, meetings, gatherings, and community-building consistent with the stated mission or purpose of the student group or program.
 - c. DSL, in partnership with ASA, will ensure that student co-curricular space is clean, functional, and safe.
 - d. DSL, SOLE, and ASA should review annual utilization patterns for student co-curricular space.
 - e. SOLE, in partnership with ASA, should develop processes for adjudicating student organization violations of the ASA's space agreement and mitigating disagreements between student organizations over space.

NEXT STEPS

To operationalize the recommendations outlined above, dedicated implementation teams will be established. These teams will leverage the recommendations, notes, and suggestions from the working group to formulate clear action plans and timelines for each aspect of implementation. Both undergraduate and graduate students will participate as members of these teams, ensuring that the implementation remains aligned with the essence of the recommendations. The following implementation teams will be established:

- **Membership, Recognition, and Training:**
 - Led by Paul Murphy, associate dean, Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement, with support from Kat Waxstein and Meghan Funk, and advised by graduate and undergraduate student representatives.
- **Financial Resources:**
 - Led by Paul Murphy with support from Edward Pesce, Ramon Downes, Peter Cummings, and Meghan Funk, and advised by graduate and undergraduate student representatives.
- **Space Resources:**
 - Led by Erin Farrell, senior associate dean, student engagement and campus activities, and David Friedrich, senior associate dean, housing and residential services, with support from the Provost's Office and Meghan Funk, and advised by graduate and undergraduate student representatives.

APPENDIX A: CHARGE TO THE STUDENT ORGANIZATION WORKING GROUP

March 2023

OVERVIEW

Student involvement in student organizations (including clubs and non-varsity sports) helps create an enriching campus experience and opportunities for hands-on learning at MIT. Over the years, the landscape of MIT's student organizations has evolved. The number of recognized organizations has grown to more than 550, which has posed some challenges in advising, risk management, space resource allocation and program funding.

For these reasons, Chancellor Nobles and Vice Chancellor and Dean for Student Life Nelson charge the Student Organization Working Group (SOWG) to consider the strengths and areas for improvement in MIT's practices relating to student organization governance, financial, space resource management, membership policies, and risk management protocols. The working group will prepare a report with recommendations and advice that will be delivered to Chancellor Nobles.

Specifically, SOWG is asked to weigh our current approach in light of best practices in the field, and to recommend areas for improvement and policy changes in the following contexts:

RECOGNITION

Recognized student organizations create opportunities for leadership, hands-on learning, and peer-to-peer engagement.

1. What is the broad governance structure that guides policies relating to student organization recognition, membership, and finances and space resource management practices?
 - a. What is the role of the Division of Student Life, Association of Student Activities, the Undergraduate Association, and the Graduate Student Council in recognizing, funding, and advising student organizations? How are decisions made related to student organization recognition? What criteria should guide continued recognition as a student organization?
 - b. What are the pros and cons to these approaches?
2. What principles and criteria should guide MIT's student organization recognition process (e.g., shared governance, financial resources, space, advising, redundancy)?
3. How might these criteria be codified as policy relating to student organization recognition processes at MIT? Consider the following: Where do policies reside? How are policies updated? Who is involved in these processes?

MEMBERSHIP

Student organizations exist for the benefit of MIT students; however, MIT's historical approach has operated on the premise that some non-student (e.g., MIT staff, faculty, partners/families, alumni, and non-MIT community) participation can add value to members' experiences.

1. Keeping student safety and opportunities for learning at the forefront, what type and level of involvement should non-students have in student clubs and organizations?

2. What criteria should guide non-student participation? Should MIT employ background checks, codes of conduct, and participation agreements? Should non-student members be subject to training and fees? Are non-student members eligible to assume leadership positions, to get involved in risk management, or to have the same decision-making authority as student members?
3. What criteria and processes should be used for removing or limiting participation of members from student organizations, both student and non-student members? Should decision-making be allocated differently based on the reason for removal or limitation (e.g., behavioral concerns, lack of participation)?
4. What resources and support are needed (e.g., space allocation, funding, staff support)?

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Student organization funding is limited and comes from a variety of sources (e.g., New Fund allocation, Student Life Fee, reserves and restricted funding, unrestricted/GIB, sponsorships, donations). Additionally, MIT's systems were not developed with student organizations in mind, which results in complications for group members. For example, students have to front funds for programs and events and submit receipts for reimbursement. Also, student groups may experience longer lead times for contract approvals.

1. What financial resources are available to recognized student organizations? How does this compare to other schools of our size?
2. What are best practices among peer schools for funding, managing, and supporting student organization spending?
3. What principles and processes should guide student organization funding? How should funds be allocated? How should reserves be managed from year-to-year? How should spending be managed? What happens to a de-recognized group's funding? What are the pros and cons of these processes?
4. What space resources are needed to support student organizations and their activities? What principles and processes should guide the distribution of these resources?
5. What are recommendations for managing space resource allocation, funding of and spending by MIT student organizations going forward?

APPENDIX B: WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

Co-Conveners

Steve Hall, *Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Head of House at New Vassar*

Ryan de Freitas Bart, *PhD Candidate, Aeronautics and Astronautics, Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics*

Suzy Nelson, *Vice Chancellor & Dean for Student Life, Division of Student Life*

Members

Jared Berezin, *Comm Lab Manager, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Head of House at Random Hall*

Justin Steil, *Assistant Professor of Law and Urban Planning, Department of Urban Studies and Planning (Spring 2023 only)*

Kim Vandiver, *Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Dean for Undergraduate Research, Director of the Edgerton Center, Director of UROP*

Zawad Chowdhury, *Class of 2023 Undergraduate Student, Mathematics, School of Science (Spring 2023 only)*

Paula Contreras Nino, *Class of 2025 Undergraduate Student, Management, Sloan School of Management (Spring 2023 only)*

Geoffrey Enwere, *Class of 2026 Undergraduate Student, Biological Engineering, School of Engineering (Fall 2023 only)*

Aristotle Grosz, *PhD Candidate, Chemical Engineering, School of Engineering (Fall 2023 only)*

Kiersten Mitzel, *Class of 2024 Undergraduate Student, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, School of Engineering (Fall 2023 only)*

Favour Oladimeji, *Class of 2024 Undergraduate Student, Biological Engineering, School of Engineering*

Cormac O'Neill, *PhD Candidate, Mechanical Engineering, School of Engineering*

Hector Wilhelm, *Class of 2025 Undergraduate Student, Biological Engineering, School of Engineering (Fall 2023 only)*

Vincent Zu, *PhD Candidate, Chemical Engineering, School of Engineering*

Gus Burkett, *Senior Associate Dean, Diversity & Community Involvement, Division of Student Life (Spring 2023 only)*

Peter Cummings, *Executive Director for Administration, Division of Student Life*

Erin Farrell, *Senior Associate Dean, Student Engagement & Campus Activities, Division of Student Life (Fall 2023 only)*

Nick Jewell, *Manager of Club Sports, Intramurals & Sports Camps, DAPER, Division of Student Life*

Paul Murphy, *Associate Dean & Director in the Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement Office (SOLE), Division of Student Life*

Meghan Funk, *Staff to Working Group, DSL Project Manager, Division of Student Life*

Katherine Waxstein, *Staff to Working Group, Assistant Dean in the Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement Office (SOLE), Division of Student Life (Fall 2023 only)*

APPENDIX C: BENCHMARKING & KEY TERMS

As part of the benchmarking exercise, staff from the Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement (SOLE) Office reviewed policies and practices around student organizations for seven peer institutions: Boston College, Boston University, Cornell University, Harvard College, Princeton University, Stanford University, and Yale University. Particular attention was paid to their process for recognition, policies for graduate and undergraduate student membership, methods for distributing funding, and amounts of supporting fees that are collected. The SOLE Office also conducted an internal review of MIT's current policies regarding student organizations. The findings of both the internal review and the benchmarking exercise were presented to the working group during the spring and fall sessions.

KEY TERMINOLOGY

The following definitions may be helpful in understanding the report:

- Association of Student Activities (ASA): A joint committee of both the Undergraduate Association (UA) and the Graduate Student Council (GSC). The ASA Executive Board advocates on behalf of student groups to gain resources for student groups' benefit, allocates resources among student groups, and arbitrates among student groups and any other involved parties. In general, the ASA oversees student group activity and is the governing body of student groups on the MIT campus. More information can be found at <http://asa.mit.edu/about-asa>
- DLCs: Department, labs, or centers at MIT
- *Mind and Hand Book*: The official guide to MIT's expectations of all undergraduate and graduate students. More information can be found at <https://handbook.mit.edu/>
- Student organization roles: Collaboratively developed during the summer of 2023 based on the first phase of SOWG meetings and preliminary recommendations.
 - Member: currently enrolled MIT student who is affiliated with a recognized student organization
 - Officer: currently enrolled MIT student who is in a leadership position in a recognized student organization
 - Participant: non-student individual who is affiliated with a recognized student organization, who regularly participates in the meetings or are engaged with the operations of the organization
 - Advisor: non-student individual who is performing a supporting role in a recognized student organization; these individuals have special responsibilities in the organization
 - Attendee: individual (student or non-student) who attends student organization events/activities, but is not actively engaged in the operations of the organization
- Student Organization Handbook: The document that outlines the procedures and guidelines of the Institute and services offered throughout various departments within and outside the Division of Student Life, with the goal of providing information needed to navigate the management of student organizations and to engage in successful student leadership at MIT. More information can be found at <https://studentlife.mit.edu/sites/default/files/SOLE%20Handbook.pdf>.
- Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement (SOLE) Office: An office in the Division of Student Life that acts as an advisor and thinking partner to the Institute's programming boards, student governing bodies and over 500+ organizations by providing guidance, tools, expertise and resources. More information can be found at <https://studentlife.mit.edu/sole>

- **Derecognition:** The process by which a student organization is no longer recognized by ASA and SOLE and loses access to space and other resources
- **Registration:** The process by which a student organization updates information about its membership, leadership, etc. with SOLE in order to maintain recognitions status and gain access to space and other resources
- **Recognition:** The process by which a student organization formally becomes part of MIT and gains access to space and other resources
