January 31, 2013

TO: McGill campus community members

FROM: Sustainability Projects Fund Working Group

SUBJECT: Response to Cyclical Review of the Sustainability Projects Fund

The Sustainability Projects Fund (SPF) was created in 2009-2010 through student referenda pledging $0.50 per student per credit, which was matched dollar-for-dollar by the McGill administration. The Sustainability Projects Fund Working Group (SPF WG) guides the management of the SPF and allocates its funds. As the SPF approaches its three-year anniversary, as a measure of good governance, we are conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the performance of the SPF. This evaluation includes an arm’s length cyclical review, a financial audit (voluntarily requested by the SPF Working Group of McGill’s Internal Audit Office), and a three-year report of the SPF’s activities. The results of the financial audit and the three-year report of the SPF activities are pending and will be released as soon as they are available.

This letter is a response to the recommendations of the Review Committee (see attached report). The arm’s length Review Committee was convened in fall 2012. The membership was as follows: The chair was an alumnus who had never been directly awarded funding, but had been peripherally involved in three SPF projects and therefore had an important working knowledge of the SPF (nominated by the SPF WG). There were two students (one nominated by SSMU and MCSS, and one by PGSS); one professor (nominated by the central administration); and one external member with expertise in evaluating funding mechanisms (recommended by the SPF WG, nominated by the Review Committee). The full report of the Review Committee, including complete terms of reference, is attached.

We would like to thank the Review Committee for performing such a thorough and candid assessment and evaluation of the three-year pilot period (2010-2013) of the Sustainability Projects Fund.

We are pleased that the findings of the Review Committee were generally very positive. The reviewers concluded that: “The SPF has been impressively well-run, especially considering its novelty and shortage of resources. In addition to fulfilling its mandate, the Fund has managed to develop substantial programs (e.g. Vision 2020) and expanded into a solid, professional program.”

The Review Committee makes several recommendations for improvement, all of which we accept and have already begun to address.

**Recommendation 1:** The creation of one or two permanent staff positions to assist in the areas of communications, visibility, project support, accountability and reporting (knowledge documentation).

**Recommendation 2:** Visibility of the Fund and its associated projects must be enhanced, particularly to broaden its user base and ensure a high level of participation amongst community members from across the university.
Recommendation 3: Information flow between the Fund and the community should be improved through avenues such as the website; institutional memory of the Fund’s staff and projects should also be better documented.

Recommendation 4: A formal accountability procedure for the projects must be established; an independent review of the projects should be conducted periodically.

We will work to thoroughly address these recommendations following the renewal of the Sustainability Projects Fund, which provides an opportunity to review our practices, programming and staff capacity. In the short term, we have already undertaken the following actions to improve in these areas:

- Interns in the Office of Sustainability are working with McGill’s Communications Services unit to develop a communications plan that will raise the visibility of the Sustainability Projects Fund;

- The Office of Sustainability Website Coordinator is working to make more information about funded projects, including all project budgets, accessible online;

- The Sustainability Projects Fund Reporting intern is working with all project team leaders to develop a comprehensive three-year report on the impact of the SPF, which will be made publicly available as soon as it is completed.

We thank all of you for your support of the Sustainability Projects Fund over the past three years and look forward to continuing to hear from and work with the entire campus community on projects that build a culture of sustainability at McGill. Please be in touch with any questions or comments. Find out more and apply for funding at www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/spf.

Sincerely,

The Sustainability Projects Fund Working Group

Shaina Agbayani (nominated by SSMU)  
Kerry Blake-Savery (nominated by MCSS)  
Talitha Calder (nominated by SSMU)  
Jerome Conraud, Energy Manager, Facilities Operations and Development  
Alex Goulet-Hanssens (nominated by PGSS)  
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