

The Ad Hoc Committees on Principles and Processes

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THE AD HOC COMMITTEE to Review MIT Gift Processes, which we call the Process Committee, was convened in mid-October 2019 by Provost Marty Schmidt. At the same time, Faculty Chair Rick Danheiser formed the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Guidelines for Outside Engagements, which we call the Principles Committee. Over the following 10 months, the two committees operated in parallel, with three Principles Committee members also serving on the Process Committee. Since principles and processes cannot, in practice, be separated, the two committees worked together, but synchronously; the issues seemed urgent enough to warrant both committees running in parallel. Both committees released their reports for comment to the MIT community on September 10, 2020.¹

The two committees were convened to address a strong sense that we seriously needed to step back and better understand, and improve, the decision-making underlying our gifts and engagements.² Campus-wide discussions in the wake of engagements with Saudi Arabia, Epstein, and others highlighted the need for a set of values and principles that could guide acceptance of both our gifts and engagements, with accompanying gift processes that then adhere to these values and principles.

As MIT grows, we rely more heavily on a broader range of donors and engagements for our operations and our

¹ The two reports are available online to the MIT community: the [Principles Report](#) and the [Process Report](#).

² The Principles Committee charge is [here](#) and the Process Committee charge is [here](#).

research, especially since the proportion of our support from U.S government agencies is declining. MIT's increasing reliance on these non-federal sources necessarily raises profound questions about these gifts and engagements. Are we inten-

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tionally or unintentionally, through these gifts and engagements, promoting an agenda that may counter our research and educational mission? Are we allowing bad actors to “launder” their reputations by engaging with us? Do these gifts and engagements inhibit our ability to promote our values in our community?

MIT has been at the world's forefront of research and education and has continually shown leadership on the issues of the day. MIT must again step up and show leadership on this set of issues that all higher education institutions are facing, and do so in a way that integrates input from as much of our community as possible, while also recognizing the mission of MIT and the necessary role fundraising plays in achieving it.

The Principles Committee was convened to build a set of values and principles to guide all our gifts and engagements. To that end, as a committee, we convened several campus conversa-

tions (15 in total across faculty, students, staff, and alumni) in fall 2019 to collect input. We requested departments, labs, and centers to convene their communities to write short white papers that would give similar inputs. In total, we received 17

white papers. We also held multiple office hours and solicited feedback via emails and informal discussions committee members had within the community. The Principles Committee's charge included a standing parallel Student Committee on Outside Engagements who deliberated on the same issues – the student committee's report is included in the draft report. Pulling together all this input, the Principles Committee then deliberated extensively on these issues through spring 2020. The bottom-up approach we took allowed us to both understand and integrate the broader MIT community's views into our deliberations.

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making. These guidelines enable us to align our gifts and engagements with our core values and principles. We recognize that the MIT community is a set of diverse individuals, with differing roles and viewpoints. Nevertheless, the MIT community is linked through common values and principles: the more firmly we can articulate those through all our actions, the stronger we are as a community.

After integrating all the feedback from the MIT community collected during fall 2019 and our own deliberations, we came to a consensus around the following nine core values: academic integrity; academic freedom; education and mentorship; service; diversity, equity, and inclusion; transparency; professional integrity; respect; and the courage to act on our convictions. The report carefully details these values and how they will work in concert with our broader principles of achieving excellence and maintaining our reputation. As we highlight in the report, “any excellence worth achieving, and any reputation worth maintaining, will be so in part because it is an expression of these core values and principles.”

The guidelines for use by decision-makers at MIT are structured in the form of two tools that allow all involved in the decision-making process around a given gift or engagement to deliberate on how the specific gift or engagement upholds our values. We recognize that each decision is unique and will not necessarily fall neatly into a particular category. We therefore constructed guidelines that would assist decision-makers by providing an inventory of questions and a basis for further deliberation. To ensure we did not create undue system inefficiencies, the tools incorporate the notion that some gifts and engagements are simple to “green-light” and others should clearly be quickly given a “red-light”, reserving time for efficient deliberation for the in-between cases.

The questions in the tools therefore focus on two types of issues: what we refer

to as red lights and yellow lights. The red and yellow light issues are equally important, differentiated by how easy or difficult it is to define the problem or draw clear cutoff lines. We recommend that any failure of the red lights should stop the gift or engagement. A failure to pass any of the yellow lights requires careful deliberation by our community, for which we recommend the creation (by Faculty Governance) of a Standing Committee. Red light issues encompass questions of national security violations, the law, academic freedom, and political, civil, and human rights. Yellow light issues arise when a gift or engagement has implica-

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tions for our reputation, our ability to promote our values in our community, and our research and educational mission. Finally, any red light failures can be appealed to the Standing Committee.

The recommended Standing Committee should be charged, first, to deliberate and make recommendations on complicated cases, and, second, to document each recommendation to create a body of precedents (or case law) to be used in making future decisions. This combination of tools, the Standing Committee, and a body of documented precedents will ultimately make decision-making more efficient while remaining in line with our core values and principles.

The Process Committee was convened to recommend changes to the practices guiding the solicitation, processing, and acceptance of gifts at MIT. As the Process Committee, we built upon the Principles

Committee’s recommendations to further highlight the role, composition, and structure of the Standing Committee, the use of precedents, and to operationalize the tools’ use. To that end, the Process Committee made the following seven recommendations.

The recommendations fall into three categories. First, Recommendations 1 and 2 advise MIT to make the processes and policies surrounding fundraising transparent through outreach to the entire MIT community, including training for any community members engaged in fundraising. More broadly, we recommend the Institute undertake a significant

effort to inform the community on the role and importance of gifts to MIT’s operations, finances, and culture. We view our Interim Report of February 14, 2020, as the first step in this direction. We also endorse and want to see strengthened a commitment to MIT continually examining and developing its values, both through Taskforce 2021 and the Values Committee announced by the Provost and Chancellor on February 2, 2020, and beyond that.

Process-related Recommendations 3, 4, 5, and 6 form the second category. MIT Advancement has robust processes already in place for its operations. We recommend all community members involved in these processes be required to operate using the tools developed by the Principles Committee, including and especially those fundraising outside of

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MIT Advancement. Currently, a six-member Interim Gift Acceptance Committee (IGAC) reviews all significant gifts. We recommend expanding the IGAC to become the Gift Acceptance Committee (GAC) with 18 members. Half of them should be faculty appointed by Faculty Governance, with the GAC's balance recommended to be administrative domain experts, students, and a post-doctoral fellow. The GAC is our recommended implementation of the Standing Committee recommended by the Principles Committee. The idea of this large committee is that it should operate like the Committee on Academic Performance, having all the needed expertise on-hand to make the right decisions in a timely way. We recommend the Provost chair the GAC, bringing our most senior faculty leader out of the shadowy margins and into the sunlight to engage with faculty and staff on gift policy. We also recommend processes that allow the GAC to respond to the MIT community's concerns over past gifts. In concert with the Principles Committee, we also recommend recording all GAC recommendations (including minority opinions where needed) and ultimate decisions in a body of precedents to be used for future decision-making.

Our final category, Recommendation 7, reinforces the goal of transparency in fundraising by asking MIT to develop a Gift Policy Guide to ensure that the MIT community understands the need for fundraising and to educate everyone involved about these recommended best practices.

We constructed our recommendations to allow MIT's fundraising model, which is centralized in MIT Advancement and decentralized through individual faculty and staff spread throughout the Institute, to continue to flourish and remain entrepreneurial. We designed our recommendations to reduce the impact on fundraising efforts while also providing a continuing review that includes a broader

spectrum of the community. The Committee discussed extensively the inclusion of students on the GAC – our hesitation was that students' presence could cause disquiet among donors. We arrived at the view that, as many of our donors are alumni, student involvement may encourage our alumni. We also see student participation as a means of informing the student community about

staff and administrative expertise, and carefully chosen faculty and student members. Our committees have served their purpose and we look forward to supporting our successor committee as we continue to work together to make MIT a better place.

As the Principles Committee emphasizes, "We hope that this guidance will become an integral part of MIT's DNA –

The work of the Process Committee relates only to gifts, while the Principles Committee developed tools for both gifts and engagements. Given the importance of gifts to MIT's operations and recent history, we believe MIT must immediately move forward with implementing our recommendations with the goal of completing the needed changes within a year.

MIT's commitment to incorporating its values into fundraising.

The work of the Process Committee relates only to gifts, while the Principles Committee developed tools for both gifts and engagements. Given the importance of gifts to MIT's operations and recent history, we believe MIT must immediately move forward with implementing our recommendations with the goal of completing the needed changes within a year. Once implementation is underway, we suggest that the Administration and Chair of the Faculty empanel an Engagements Committee to start work this winter to build a set of processes for engagements, taking the work of our two committees as given. This Engagements Committee should have faculty membership partially drawn from the current Process and Principles Committees and include administration and staff members with the needed expertise in engagements. The Engagements Committee should use the process our two committees followed as a template for their work and the members of the Engagement Committee from our two committees would provide the needed continuity and ensure consistency with our committees' recommendations.

Our committees succeeded because they had clear, limited charges, the needed

a feature of our shared institutional culture and our characters as individuals." The values underpinning the recommended guidelines came through a bottom-up process, reaching out to the community for input and deliberating extensively. In both committees, the process of deep deliberation was crucial to building consensus around the issues. This involved a significant commitment from all the members of the two committees. Implementing these recommendations from the two committees will take a similar commitment from the entire MIT community. In that vein, we encourage all faculty, staff, and students to engage with our reports and provide input and feedback. Please send comments to adhoccomments@mit.edu by October 30.

Ultimately, we all hold the responsibility of ensuring that our individual and collective actions align with our values and principles, as implemented and made actual through processes we can all trust. We all have a role, therefore, in building these principles and processes. ■

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