Peer Ears Constitution  
(Updated November 2015)

This document is intended to preserve the institutional memory of the MIT Peer Ears organization written by and for its executive board members. We - the original executive members - mandate that all future presidents make this document available to the executive board and that all officers read the document before assuming office.

Peer Ears agrees to abide by the rules and regulations of the Association of Student Activities, and its executive board. This constitution, amendments to it, and the by-laws of this organization shall be subject to review by the ASA Executive Board to ensure that they are in accordance with the aforementioned rules and regulations.

MIT Peer Ears will not discriminate in its selection of student members or leaders, in accordance with MIT’s non-discrimination policy.

**Amending the Constitution**

- Requests for amendments to the constitution can be brought by Peer Ears not on the executive board to executive board meetings, or to their Living Group Coordinator.
- If the amendment concerns Peer Ears general function, a >50% vote of the executive council plus the approval of the MIT Mental Health clinicians is required to pass the amendment.
- If the amendment concerns the Peer Ears executive board structure and function, two thirds agreement of those present at the executive board meeting is required to pass the amendment.

**Table of Contents**

| 2  | Mission          |
| 4  | Infrastructure  |
| 7  | Administrative Guidelines |
| 8  | Meetings & Events |
**Mission**

What Peer Ears Do

Research has shown that the people most likely to be confided in when a student is in mental distress is a friend. Peer Ears aims to provide students at MIT with the tools to support their peers in times of mental distress. Applicants (except in extenuating circumstances) are trained by MIT Mental Health clinicians to support students by being active listeners within living communities and to help them navigate on-campus mental health resources by assisting students in setting up appointments with Student Support Services (S3), MIT Mental Health, or any other support office on campus.

Who Peer Ears Are

Peer Ears are MIT students who care about the mental health of those around them. To become a Peer Ear, one must first fill out a short confidential application, be interviewed, and undergo training at the discretion of the clinicians at MIT Mental Health. At all times, there will be at least five members, with at least 50% of the members current MIT students.

The Application Process

The application should be sent via email to all participating dorms and FSILGs a month prior to the end of each semester, assuming the MIT Mental Health clinicians have agreed to the dates of a training session to take place before or near the beginning of the subsequent semester. The application is to be confidential, reviewed only by the MIT Mental Health clinicians and the MIT Staff Advisor. Completed applications should be sent to peerears-app@mit.edu to ensure this process is smooth.

Some circumstances that may prevent an application from being approved include:

- Being a first-semester freshman
- Having returned from academic or medical leave less than a semester prior
- Being or having been on academic warning with a credit limit less than a year prior
- Being a Medlink
- Receiving more applications than can be accommodated with Peer Ears’ resources
- Other concerns at the discretion of the clinicians and MIT staff reviewing the application.

The above points are subject to a case by case review.

The interviews will be conducted by current Peer Ears, who will not have access to the written applications, to provide additional feedback on applicants to the MIT Mental Health clinicians. Once an application is approved, the tentative Peer Ear must undergo training by MIT Mental Health clinicians before becoming an active member of the organization.

**Establishment In New Living Communities**
Before establishing Peer Ears in a new living community, we are required to explain the program to the dorm’s executive board and house team, and obtain their approval.
**Infrastructure**

MIT Staff Advisor  
Sharon Snaggs Gendron  
Assistant Director of Student Outreach & Support  
W20-507

MIT Mental Health Advisors  
Jessica Barton, L.I.C.S.W.  
Daniel Debowy, M.D., Ph.D.

**Executive Board Structure**

- **President(s)**
  - Is the face of Peer Ears to the MIT community  
  - Coordinates various initiatives within Peer Ears  
  - Attends and presides over both executive and general body meetings  
  - Communicates with administration, including the Division of Student Life  
  - Communicates with MIT Mental Health clinicians  
  - Communicates between Living Group Coordinators  
  - Co-presidency is allowed and may vary by year (may have internal/external)  
  - Must be a current MIT student, distinct from the Treasurer

- **Treasurer**
  - Keeps records of funding  
  - Point person for Peer Ears’ request for funding from the Division of Student Life and Finboard  
  - Oversees spending on Peer Ear initiatives  
  - Must be a current MIT student, distinct from the role of President

- **Secretary**
  - Keeps meeting notes and shares them with Peer Ears  
  - Transcribes Recorded General Meeting Notes  
  - Keeps file sharing, such as Google Drive and/or Dropbox up to date  
  - Coordinates campus meeting times with relevant parties

- **Living Group (LG) Coordinators:**
  - There will be one Coordinator per living community, including dorms and FSLIGs  
  - Attends internal meetings with houseteam/housecom and leadership as necessary  
  - Determines when internal living community meetings are held

- **VP of Communications**
  - Responsible for coordinating flyers, website work, and published materials for workshops
- Upkeeps the Peer Ears facebook page
- Designs distribution materials for Peer Ears
- Keeps fb page, mitpeerears.org, and mitstruggletogther.tumblr.com (Firehose Dump) updated
- New tech initiatives/ideas start-communicate (Any tumblr sharing of experiences, 7 cups of Tea feedback, new MIT MH Portal feedback…)
- Posts on new class of 2019 facebook group about Peer Ears (possibly a mental health questions facebook group for incoming frosh)

- Vice President of Campus Coordination -
  - Heads committee with representatives for SMASH and ASA meetings and collaborations with other student organizations
    - Keep Exec updated with campus initiatives on mental health: I.e. MindHandHeart Chancellor Project/advise, take meeting minute notes
  - Coordinates with events for UA wellness week and wellness fairs
  - Finds outreach programs for Peer Ears to attend
  - Reserves campus spaces and finds speakers

- Vice President of Peer Training
  - Requires some experience in mental health
  - Helps design training process for new and returning Peer Ears
  - Works with Living Group Coordinators to arrange training workshops in dorms

Adding New Positions to the Executive Board
The president(s) and all vice presidents reserve the right to propose and create committees by proposing new positions to the rest of the executive board and obtaining two thirds agreement of those present in favor of any new position. New positions should be added as amendments to the Constitution as they are created.

Executive Board Selection Process
Officers should be chosen the month before the semester ends (April or November) to allow for 1-2 week transition period between old and new officers. New officers take office when the semester ends. Selection will be by application and vote, with platforms made available to the executive board as well as the organization as a whole for the sake of transparency.

All members of the executive board must be trained Peer Ears in good standing. Positions should be filled at the end of the semester by current Peer Ears, with any unfilled positions made available again at the beginning of the subsequent semester to the entire group, including any newly trained Peer Ears.

The presidency is open only to those who have either served previously on the executive board or have been an active Peer Ear for at least one year. The incoming president should be
selected by the outgoing president and any members of the outgoing executive board not applying for the presidency.

The incoming executive board shall be agreed upon by the outgoing executive board, alongside representatives from the Division of Student life and Mental Health staff, with individuals wishing to remain on the executive board prohibited from taking part in the discussion about the position(s) for which they are applying to hold in the coming year. Written applications will be submitted and interviews will be conducted as needed. If positions are unfilled for whatever reason during the semester outside of the normal application period, the same process applies, with the full executive board allowed to review the applications.

Removal from Office
A Peer Ear can be removed from office by a ⅔ agreement by the executive board, including a representative from the Division of Student Life and Mental Health staff, after concern has been brought forth by anyone in the organization. Valid concerns include, but are not limited to, missing an excessive number of executive board or dorm meetings, not fulfilling duties as an officer as described above, and not fulfilling duties as a Peer Ear (see “Removal from the Organization” below).

The removed officer should be replaced by a Peer Ear selected by application and approval of the rest of the executive board.

Removal from the Organization
Serious concern about a Peer Ear’s status should be raised if:

- Concern is voiced by a mental health clinician, another Peer Ear, or a community member on the appropriateness of an individual as a Peer Ear
- The confidentiality of personal information discussed within the person’s capacity as Peer Ear is breached
- The Peer Ear is not fulfilling their duties as a Peer Ear, as defined by their Living Group Coordinator and the Executive Board.

After a concern is brought forward, the Peer Ear in question should personally meet with the mental health clinicians running Peer Ears, who will decide whether it is appropriate for the Peer Ear to remain an active member of the organization. The content of the conversation, but not the decision rendered by the clinicians, should remain confidential.

If a Peer Ear no longer desires to be part of the organization, they should notify their Living Group Coordinator, who will notify their (RL)AD and the Peer Ears executive board.
Administrative Guidelines

ASA Signatories (to take effect after ASA approval)

- Financial - Treasurer, President(s)
- Reservation - President(s), Vice Presidents

Peer Ears Website:
mitpeerears.org
Meetings and Events

Meetings

The executive board should hold at least biweekly meetings at a consistent time when all executive board members can be present. The living group coordinator should organize at least one meeting per month to check on the wellbeing of Peer Ears in the living group and share organizational and situational updates.

Peer Ears currently meet with the advisors as needed for personal support. This may prove more difficult to arrange as the group grows. For support, Peer Ears should feel comfortable calling the Mental Health advisors, approaching their living group coordinator for advice, or attending walk-in hours at MIT Mental Health if necessary.

There shall be at least one General Body Meeting (GBM) per month. These should be used to update the group as a whole on progress made by the executive board and in any particular dorms, as well as to either notify Peer Ears of training opportunities, or to hold training sessions. These meetings will be headed by the executive board, with training overseen by the Mental Health Services staff. If a member cannot make these meetings, he/she must meet with the Mental Health advisors in that month instead.

Any decisions will be made by a vote, where over 50% constitutes the passing of the motion.

Events

Peer Ears from each living group should host at least one event per semester (assuming sufficient funding) to advertise their availability to the living community and educate residents on mental health related topics.

Campus-wide events may be held to advertise Peer Ears’ availability and capabilities before the start of a new application cycle, and/or to provide basic training sessions (e.g. QPR-like training) to the MIT community. However, the focus should be kept on the presence of Peer Ears in dorms.