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The Flat bike collective's *volunteer handbook*

second edition

Want to volunteer at the Flat? E-mail theflat.bikecollective@gmail.com and let us know!

theflat.wordpress.com

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Mandate

The Flat is a collective that works to encourage cycling through the sharing of knowledge and tools.

The Flat bike collective seeks to:

make cycling more accessible by

- sharing repair facilities and knowledge
- offering workshops to persons of all skill levels
- reducing the costs of bike maintenance

provide a welcoming environment by

- recognizing the existence of power imbalances
- encouraging dialogue and diversity of opinion
- confronting discriminatory actions and words
- making decisions by consensus

minimize our environmental impact by

- recycling and reusing parts
- promoting cycling as a viable mode of transportation

create a greater sense of community by

- making our resources available to groups on and off campus
- supporting bike-related projects and events
- collaborating with other bike organizations

Being a Volunteer

Being a volunteer at the Flat is an opportunity to gain hands-on experience with bikes. Whether you know a lot about bikes or have no previous experience, everyone has something to offer. If you are just beginning to learn about bikes, we encourage you to attend the Flat's workshops and/or ask more experienced volunteers while on your shift. We want the shop to be a welcoming space that gives everyone the opportunity to learn, teach, and get along.

Your first shift

Your role will be—drum roll, please—New Volunteer (NV)! You will shadow (follow around) other, more experienced volunteers to get a sense of what each volunteer role entails. Other volunteer roles are outlined later in this guide.

Your next few shifts

You might be assigned POS (point-of-sale) or DP (door person) duty. This does not mean that you won't help with any repairs. You should keep shadowing other volunteers to learn as much as you can. It's rare that if you're handling POS you'll be stuck dealing with money the whole shift. It's also unlikely that no other volunteers will do POS during the shift. Everyone helps everyone else out.

If someone asks you for help with something you don't know how to fix, it's okay, just ask another volunteer for help!

Don't feel bad if you're unsure about what's wrong with a bike or how to properly do a repair.

We're all learning.

Ask another volunteer if they feel more comfortable working on the problem and if they can show both you and the shop user how to fix it. Or, if you feel up to it, admit that you don't have much experience with that issue and suggest working on it together.

Check in a repair manual or online at biketutor.com or parktools.com. When you're done, get someone else to check over the work and make sure everything is functioning properly.

Expectations for Volunteers

- read the mandate and volunteer manual so that you have an idea about how we operate
- show up to your shifts 10 to 15 minutes early. If you are unable to make a shift, consult the emergency volunteer list and call someone to replace you. It's your responsibility to find a replacement.
- support others in learning how to fix their own bikes, but **maintain a hands-off approach** and let them do the work themselves
- don't be afraid to ask questions
- keep learning about bikes by talking to other volunteers, reading, and practicing (work on your bike at Volunteer Fridays!)
- **learn about anti-oppression and confront negative behaviour in the shop**
- get to know other volunteers
- help keep the shop organized
- take the initiative, see what needs work in the shop and address it
- you are part of the shop! help make it awesome.

Tips!

- Take a break once in a while and leave the room to refresh yourself.
- Be realistic and honest. Bike repair takes a lot longer than people think. Ask someone how much time they are willing to spend, and strategize your maintenance accordingly. If someone wants to overhaul their bottom bracket and fix their brakes, but have never done either before, brakes should be the priority.
- **Don't make assumptions.** Ask people if they have experience working on their bike and if they want help.

Various Volunteer Roles

Door Person (DP)

tools: clipboard, 14mm & 15mm wrenches

duties: keeps track of people coming into the shop. Does this by keeping a list of people who want to use the shop and what they want to work on. Do they need a stand or are they just patching a flat? There can be 5 people on stands, 2 people patching flats, and 2 people truing wheels at a time. The DP helps people take off their wheels at the door if they need to fix flats or do truing, and then the bikes need to be locked outside. Keep track of who is in the shop, who is leaving, and who is next in line.

Do not let people fix their bikes in the hallway; it's a fire hazard, the security guards and porters might yell at someone, and we don't want to disrespect other groups and people around us.

Keyholder (K)

Has access to the key so opens and closes the shop.

Mechanic (M)

Has a decent amount of bike maintenance under their belt, or is learning a lot.

Experienced Mechanic (EM)

Has lots of experience under their belt and can give guidance and advice for more complicated repairs. They might have more knowledge on the intricacies and specifics of various parts and special tools. Other volunteers should always feel comfortable asking the EM for help and advice on problems that they are not familiar or completely comfortable with and the EM will try their best to help out. Keep in mind that the EM is always learning, too!

Point-of-Sale (POS)

Rings in sales and handles cash when necessary, otherwise helps people with repairs.

Does not take I.O.U.s!

Anti-Oppression

Power and privilege can play out in the Flat (and anywhere else) in destructive ways. Anti-Oppression is the practice of challenging behaviour and language that marginalize, exclude, discriminate against, or de-humanize others. It is important to recognize the various systems of oppression so that we can take active steps to confront them. Some of these are: patriarchy/sexism, homophobia, racism, ableism, ageism, level of education, and class.

Oppressive things that could happen at the Flat:

- a volunteer ignoring a middle-aged shop user
- a male volunteer fixing a woman’s bike for her and not encouraging her to do it herself
- a shop user making assumptions about a mechanic’s sexual orientation and/or making negative comments about it
- anyone saying things like “That’s gay” or “Getting this seatpost out is a real bitch!”
- a volunteer making a shop user feel bad for not knowing how to fix something
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If you hear offensive language or see discriminatory behaviour, either from a volunteer or a shop user, you need to challenge it. It can be as easy as saying “Hey, it’s not cool to say that, especially not in this space,” or, “We have a hands-off policy, remember?” If you don’t feel comfortable doing this, talk to another volunteer about doing so. Think about how you could talk to someone about their behaviour in a way that would make them think about it—and not just think that you’re attacking them.

If you do approach someone about their behaviour and they start to argue or they don’t seem receptive, they may just be acting defensively because they’ve never been challenged before and don’t know how else to react. It’s always worth talking to people even if it doesn’t seem like they get the message because it shows other people what we value and, conversely, what kind of behaviour we don’t want in our space.

Anti-Oppression continued

Anti-Oppression Checklist

- challenge yourself to be honest and open and take risks to address racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia head on.
- observe how you occupy space. do you stand in the way of others when they try to get past you or reach for a tool? make sure you give others enough room to work on their bike or participate in a workshop.
- challenge the behaviour, not the person. be sensitive and promote open dialogue.
- don't generalize feelings, thoughts, behaviours, etc. to a whole group.
- when someone offers criticism around oppressive behavior, treat it as a gift instead of challenging the person or invalidating their experience.
- don't feel guilty, feel responsible. being part of the problem doesn't mean you can't be an active part of the solution.
- be conscious of how your use of language may perpetuate racism, sexism, homophobia, or ageism.

Practicing anti-oppression in real terms is not only confronting individual examples of bigotry, or confronting societal examples, it is also confronting ourselves and our own roles of power and oppression in our communities and at large.

Though you may be a person who would never think to say anything racist/sexist/classist etc., by not realizing the power that you hold, and how your actions affect other people you will inevitably fall into sustaining and contributing to a larger system of oppression. You need to consider the ways in which you might personally make people feel uncomfortable or oppressed and work to change your thinking and behaviour in order to stop that from happening.

Privilege, like power, can be used for positive purposes but should be used with awareness and care.

Some of this anti-oppression information is adapted from a document compiled by Lisa Fithian from the "Anti-Racism Principles and Practices" by RiseUp DAN-LA, Overcoming Masculine Oppression by Bill Moyers and the FEMMAFESTO by a women's affinity group in Philadelphia, found at <http://bit.ly/yx7kq>

Hands Off!

At the Flat, we operate with a Hands Off policy, because it gives people a better opportunity to learn bike mechanics and it helps empower shop users to challenge themselves. It means that **volunteers do not repair bikes, they help others learn how to do bike repair.**

There are times when touching tools and/or someone else's bike is okay. You are allowed to demonstrate how to do something or to offer an extra hand. If the shop user is unable to perform a specific task and they want you to try, that's fine, but:

Sometimes it takes more than one try to get something right or to learn how to use a tool. The slow and often frustrating process will be far more educational for a patron than just watching a volunteer quickly solving a problem. Urging people to keep trying is an important part of being a volunteer. If you absolutely need to do something for the person, make sure it's okay, and give a detailed description of what you're doing.

Don't underestimate another person's abilities and desire to learn!

Cleaning and Closing up Shop

Please leave the shop clean after every shift. The more you **urge users to clean up after themselves**, the less work you will have to do at the end. If you try to straighten up the shop and put back tools throughout the shift, cleaning up at the end will be easier.

If somebody has a mechanical issue that will take too long to fix or can be done better with more time, suggest that they come back another day to finish it. Check the time before starting a repair and gauge whether or not the person will be able to finish it before 8 o'clock.

Cleaning Checklist

- put away all tools. check the ledges above each stand.
- put away any used parts that were left out. get rid of parts that are not salvageable.
- clean off the front counter. please keep tools, parts, and other stuff off this space.
- tidy up the back and new parts area.
- take paper/cardboard/plastic recycling out to the bins by the TV McGill office.
- sweep the floor after every shift and mop if necessary.
- clean up the sink area.

Frequently Asked Questions

Where is the Flat located?

SSMU building b-02, McGill University downtown campus
3480 McTavish St.

When are you open?

Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays 5-8pm.

Collective meetings are Wednesdays at 5:30pm.

Workshops are Wednesdays at 7pm (check the schedule on our website).

Who can use the shop?

Anyone can use the shop, whether or not they attend McGill or are a student. There is no membership fee or application process.

Where do you get your funding?

For the last 2 years, we have applied for and received a portion of SSMU's green fee, a student fee levy of \$1.25 per semester, which is dedicated to green initiatives. We received \$4700 our first year, and \$4650 our second year. We also accept donations and make profit on the parts we sell.

Why do you make profit on parts?

We sell our parts at MSRP (manufacturers' suggested retail price) rather than at cost so that we do not compete with other local bike shops, and invest profit we make back into the shop.

Who runs the place?

There is no one person who runs the Flat. We are run collectively by a group of bike enthusiasts who share the responsibilities of volunteer coordination, finances, shop maintenance, etc. We make decisions by consensus at Wednesday meetings, in which anyone can participate. We try not to have a hierarchical structure because there are benefits in equal participation in the decision-making process.

Giving everyone a chance to talk about a decision fosters a collective feeling of ownership of the space and its processes. The consensus-based participation approach encourages people to explain why they hold a certain position. This allows people to revise their own and others' positions through dialogue. You do not necessarily need to bring any specialized skills, just a willingness to learn and contribute.

Do you sell bikes?

Nope. Rather than being a retail bike shop, the Flat is a space where anyone can come and build or work on their bike. This way, the focus is on teaching and learning rather than profit.

How long have you been around?

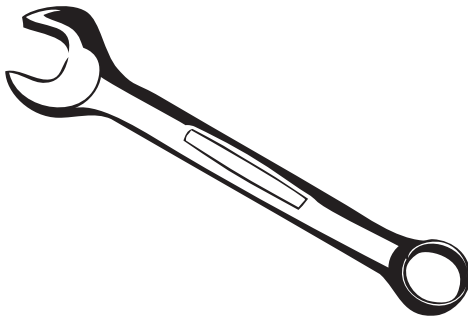
The Flat (originally called SSMU Bike Collective) opened up as a Students' Society of McGill University service in March 2008. Apart from summer renovations, we have been open 2-3 days a week since.

Why do you have women and trans only workshops?

We recognize that bike mechanics and knowledge exchange about bikes can be intimidating ventures. We also recognize that, like many other bike collectives and shops, we have an over-representation of male mechanics. To address both of these concerns, we reserve certain workshops for women and trans folk. We seek to develop a non-threatening learning space that will encourage involvement of all skill levels. These workshops address concerns expressed by many of our users. That said, women and trans folk are encouraged to attend the workshops intended for everyone.

How can I learn more about the Flat?

Check out our website, theflat.wordpress.com, sign up to receive our newsletter, help out at a taskerade, or drop by a collective meeting.



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