

Office of Government and Community Relations

MIT has a unique commitment to its host city and cares deeply about the community of which it is proud to be a member. Housed in the executive vice president and treasurer's office, the [Office of Government and Community Relations \(OGCR\)](#) serves as a liaison to the City of Cambridge and coordinates a wide variety of outreach efforts that benefit the local community. From supporting nonprofit organizations to participating in neighborhood dialogue around public policy matters, MIT strives to be actively engaged in the vibrant civic life of the city. In addition to its work in local communities, the office is a liaison to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and supports the mission of the MIT Washington Office by reinforcing the efforts of the president, faculty, and administrators in their contacts with government officials and policy organizations.

The office is available as a resource to the Institute community for matters related to government or the community of Cambridge. It is also a resource to MIT's neighbors who seek guidance in their interactions with the Institute. OGCR is a communications link, a catalyst for action, and a resource for both MIT and the external community and is committed to promoting productive collaboration in all of its public interactions.

COVID-19

The response to COVID-19 had a significant impact on the work of the office. Similar to other areas across MIT, our work became remote and relied on new technologies to replace in-person events, meetings, and communications. With a state-wide shutdown of most economic-based activities, the work of the Office of Government and Community Relations changed drastically to mobilize support for our neighbors.

Neighborhood Response to COVID-19

MIT contributed steadily and generously to the City of Cambridge's response to COVID-19. With deep concern for our neighbors, OGCR spearheaded several projects to assist local businesses, individuals, and families with access to rent relief, food, shelter, COVID-19 testing, K-12 and science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) enrichment programming, and increased giving to local nonprofit organizations. Highlights of these actions include:

- The creation of "Full STEAM Ahead," a 10-week academic enrichment program to assist K-12 students with remote learning
- A series of public workshops created by the Job Connector in partnership with the City of Cambridge to assist residents in navigating unemployment during the pandemic
- Donation of \$250,000 towards the city's establishment of the War Memorial Homeless Shelter for individuals impacted by COVID-19
- Donation of \$250,000 to fund a mobile COVID-19 testing site for Cambridge residents

- A donation of \$50,000 to the Cambridge Mayor’s Disaster Relief Fund to help residents with economic challenges as a result of the pandemic; office staff also served on the fundraising committee for the fund
- Collection and distribution of over 560,000 pieces of personal protective equipment from MIT departments, labs, and centers (DLCs) for distribution to Cambridge emergency response personnel
- Establishment of a COVID-19 Neighborhood Response Fund that raised \$30,000 from faculty and staff and supported six Cambridge nonprofits providing direct services to residents
- The creation of an auction-style fundraiser that raised \$15,000 for the Cambridge Mayor’s Relief Fund and the Cambridge Community Foundation’s COVID-19 fund

In addition to these activities, the office produced a short video for a campus-wide MIT Town Hall cataloging major MIT COVID-19 efforts. Created to inspire both the MIT and Cambridge communities, the video was a good reminder of the depth and breadth of MIT’s shift to solving a society-wide problem.

Support of Nonprofits

OCGR is charged with managing the Institute’s relationships with over 100 local nonprofit organizations. The office supports area agencies through financial donations, hands-on assistance, use of MIT facilities, and engagement on boards and committees.

Through direct donations, the office engaged with approximately 65 nonprofit organizations in the broader Cambridge area. Monetary contributions supported a diverse range of nonprofit activities including community events, K-12 programming, and housing assistance. OGCR also makes in-kind contributions by donating or subsidizing the use of MIT facilities for nonprofit events. These events brought visibility to MIT and fostered positive relations between the Institute and its neighbors. In addition, the office worked with MIT Dining and the Office of Sustainability on a food rescue program to benefit Food for Free.

OGCR staff serve on the boards and committees of many local nonprofits, including the Cambridge Community Foundation, Just-A-Start, and the YMCA. One staff member was named board president at Cambridge School Volunteers, an organization that manages volunteer opportunities in the Cambridge Public Schools.

Co-director Paul Parravano’s work on the Cambridge Community Benefits Advisory Committee continued in FY2021. After years of preparation, the committee awarded \$800,000 in implementation grants to four collaborations composed of 20 Cambridge nonprofit organizations.

Civic Engagement

The Office of Government and Community Relations is responsible for managing the Institute’s relationship with Cambridge and Boston civic organizations. This past year, OGCR staff represented MIT on the boards and committees of the Boston Chamber of

Commerce, the Central Square Business Improvement District, the East Cambridge Business Association, the Kendall Square Association, the New England Council, and the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce.

Educational Initiatives

The office's K-12 outreach administrator continued to build relationships between MIT and the Cambridge K-12 community to create an active network for ongoing engagement. With a foundation of contacts within both MIT and the Cambridge Public School system, the administrator has started to test out programs developed through these connections, for example visits to MIT Sea Grant and a tour of the MIT Museum for Cambridge students. Programs also included opportunities for educators to engage in guided networking and brainstorming around a STEAM curriculum.

In addition to planning educational programming, the administrator has been finding and cataloging existing engagements between MIT DLCs and Cambridge public schools. One example is the partnership between the MIT Materials Research Laboratory and the Putnam Avenue Upper School, which has a long-standing materials science exploration program within the school.

The administrator worked to better understand the ways in which undergraduate student groups engage with K-12 education. He advised the Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers at MIT on its work with Chelsea High School students and worked with SHINE for Girls on recruitment and space use for its academic camps. Through this work, the administrator provides safety guidance for working with minors, increases program effectiveness by targeting the best connections within school systems, and guides undergraduate groups in developing sustainable programming that will continue after students have graduated from MIT.

Through these different avenues, the administrator is working with the pK-12 Action Group (pre-kindergarten through grade 12) to map out the full picture of MIT's ongoing K-12 efforts in order to help the Institute build an overarching strategy that ensures equitable engagement with all our communities of learners.

The office continued its partnership with the Lemelson-MIT Program in advancing a Pathways to Invention K-12 outreach initiative at Fletcher-Maynard Academy in The Port neighborhood. Using Lemelson-MIT's expertise and curriculum as a foundation, the program introduces students to making and inventing, and to the many college and career paths that develop from innovation. The program continues to be successful and is looking to expand to the rest of Cambridge as Lemelson-MIT begins building its community programming in the East Cambridge Foundry Building.

Local Government and Neighborhood Relations

Maintaining productive and open communications with public officials and governmental bodies is an essential part of OGCR's work. Office staff continued to provide critical information to the city through the compilation of the annual [Town Gown Report](#) and its presentation to the Cambridge Planning Board. In addition, the office coordinated MIT's preparation for public hearings and meetings before various

governmental boards on a broad range of topics including graduate housing, local resiliency initiatives, the Grand Junction Multi-use Path, and bicycle infrastructure.

OGCR provided political guidance and community outreach for all of MIT's investment and academic development projects, including the Kendall Square Initiative, the Volpe project, the west campus graduate student dormitory, the MIT Schwarzman College of Computing, the music building, the Metropolitan Storage Warehouse, and the campus wayfinding initiative. This support, provided by Co-director Sarah Gallop, included strategic planning, internal and external communications, updates to city officials, participation in hearings, and interactive meetings for both the MIT and the Cambridge community.

Although COVID-19 closed campus for all public activities, the office helped make special arrangements with the acting deputy executive vice president, the Campus Activities Complex, MIT Police, and the City of Cambridge to ensure the election polling location in Kresge Auditorium could remain open for in-person voting for both the primary and national elections.

State Government Relations

With campus research shifting toward solutions to help lessen the societal strain of COVID-19, OGCR served as a catalyst to introduce the work of MIT researchers to Massachusetts governor Charlie Baker's administration. One example was the development of private automated contact tracing by MIT faculty and Lincoln Laboratory staff to create an automated and digital contact tracing method that heavily emphasized privacy protection for individuals. The office convened a regional group of mayors, local public health directors, and town managers to discuss implementation of pilots around this initiative. Governor Baker supported the effort by offering welcoming remarks at ImPACT 2020, a symposium on contact tracing. Additionally, the office connected the Baker administration to an MIT Sloan research group that created COVID-19 guidelines to support long-term senior healthcare facilities.

Office staff worked with internal and external colleagues to manage MIT's response to state legislative initiatives. OGCR continued to partner with senior MIT leadership, peer institutions, and the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Massachusetts to provide feedback on legislative matters such as sexual misconduct, higher education financial oversight, and land use.

Federal Relations

OGCR works closely with the Washington Office to support President Rafael Reif in interactions with federal officials and to further MIT's mission at the national level. Working with the DC office, internal communications groups, the Association of American Universities, and the wider MIT network, OGCR has been heavily involved in establishing connections for future collaboration within the executive branch and has made many successful contacts.

OCGR solicited numerous meetings with congressional leaders and professional committee staff to provide opportunities to communicate MIT's position on policies that relate to higher education during President Reif's multiple trips to Washington, DC. The

office was able to continue these meetings during the COVID-19 shutdown by planning remote conference sessions with legislators. Those meetings focused on MIT's interest in the value of federal research funding, competitiveness in innovation policy, and economic development through innovation.

Communications

OGCR continues to reach out to its neighbors through social media channels such as Twitter and NextDoor. In its third year, the office's Twitter handle made 312,000 impressions and grew to 550 neighborhood followers. The office was most successful in engaging online users through posts about OGCR's work with the Cambridge Housing Authority's summer internship program and the opening of the Brothers Marketplace grocery store in Kendall Square. The office maintained regular communications with the Institute's abutting neighborhoods of Cambridgeport, East Cambridge, Wellington-Harrington, Central Square, and The Port regarding MIT projects and initiatives.

Office staff responded to numerous media inquiries regarding Kendall Square, the Volpe project, PILOT, real estate taxes, building projects, student housing, and other town-gown related issues.

Internal MIT Relations

OGCR staff served on several Institute committees and groups, such as the Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Planning Committee, the Transportation Committee, Community Giving, the Information Group, the Human Resources Employee Resource Group on Persons with Disabilities, and the Communications Operations Group. One project of note was Paul Parravano's work on the Digital Accessibility Working Group, which is charged with developing policies that ensure MIT websites, technologies, and applications are digitally accessible for people with visual and hearing impairments. Additionally, OGCR staff provided regular detailed updates to the Office of the Executive Vice President to better inform senior leaders of OGCR's work.

OGCR staff collaborated extensively with the MIT Investment Management Company (MITIMCo), the Office of Sustainability, the Department of Facilities, the Department of Student Life, the Office of the Executive Vice President and Treasurer, and MIT Human Resources on a range of policy and community outreach matters in order to develop consensus around MIT's approach. Staff provided strategic guidance to offices and departments advancing Cambridge-based projects.

The Job Connector by MIT

The office, working closely with MITIMCo, launched the [Job Connector by MIT](#). Established as part of MIT's Volpe zoning agreement, this initiative was created to connect local residents to jobs and workforce development opportunities within Cambridge's vibrant innovation economy. Consisting of three staff members, the Job Connector is charged with developing programming and creating pipelines to assist residents in securing jobs in Cambridge.

The Job Connector's first year was dedicated to building relationships, systems, and a client base. To that end, staff leveraged existing relationships with Building Pathways and Brothers Marketplace to develop programming that was ready to implement immediately following the store's grand opening in October. The Job Connector also hosted local nonprofit Just-A-Start's information technology training seminar in its classroom space, and the Building Pathways' instructional program in its banquet space.

During COVID-19, Job Connector staff pivoted to provide their services to clients online, using Zoom and other collaborative tools to engage with residents. Strategy shifted from hosting programming to primarily working one-on-one with local job seekers. With the economy heavily impacted by COVID-19, staff partnered with the Cambridge Office of Workforce Development to develop a three-part webinar series that addressed unemployment during the pandemic. Residents were also offered virtual job readiness programming through partnership with the Central Square Business Innovation District.

Establishing a new entity is a difficult task, made harder by the numerous changes brought by the COVID-19 shutdown. Despite these challenges, remote work provided an opportunity for Job Connector staff to focus on raising its online profile and building its reputation in client services. With those foundational pieces in place, the Job Connector is preparing itself for success once physical reopening occurs.

Community Service Fund

OGCR and the Community Services Office continue to explore enhanced coordination between the [MIT Community Service Fund \(CSF\)](#) and Community Giving to simplify messaging intended to boost fundraising and promote awareness of CSF's grant program. This work seeks to elevate the visibility of the Community Service Fund and combine the energy and passion of both boards toward the single goal of raising funds to support MIT volunteerism.

Gordon Kaufman Professor of Management Jared Curhan from the Sloan School of Management oversaw this work as board chair and continued to provide guidance on maintaining the independence and values of the CSF through this time of transition.

During COVID-19, the Community Service Fund opened to proposals that offered solutions to the unique challenges of the pandemic. "Flash funding" guaranteed a 48-hour turnaround on decisions and provided grants of up to \$1,000 for quick solutions. Proposals included a low-cost medically viable ventilator and several student and staff groups dedicated to producing personal protective equipment for healthcare workers.

Sarah Gallop

Co-director

Paul Parravano

Co-director