

Alexandra Cirgenski

I am a lesbian/queer woman currently pursuing her MBA at McGill University. Prior to moving to Montreal, I co-founded the Brooklyn chapter of an all female arm wrestling troupe Five Borough Ladies Arm Wrestling (<http://5blaw.com/>) that uses neophilanthropy to raise money for local organizations that provide support for marginalized individuals in society. In my voluntary role as Managing and PR Director from 2011-2014 my duties spanned from event coordination, promotion, refereeing, emceeing, performing, wrestling, face painting and fundraising. The success of our brawls is indicated in how our organization, entirely made up of volunteers, was able to raise over \$50,000. Even without my leadership, the group is still thriving and still hosts semi-annual brawls.

While in business school I have been elected the president of the McGill OUTLook on Business Club which is focused on promoting inclusion and diversity of the LGBTQ* communities within the Desautels Faculty of Management through workshops, knowledge-sharing, and facilitation of positive communication tactics among MBA students. I recently held a school-wide anti-oppression, diversity and equity workshop, (in partnership with SEDE) open to all students of the graduate management faculty. This was the first workshop of its kind open to the management students and was very well received. The Marcel Desautels Institute for Integrated Management has also awarded me a Student Associate position, where I work closely with the McGill Architecture research group FARMM and am currently collaborating on building a community engagement and business plan for their hybrid think tank and maker-space. In this engagement plan, I have been conducting research on the public consultation process required in development processes within Montreal, comparing the benefits of transaction versus transformation community projects, and am building concrete stakeholder analysis tools that can be applied to future projects of this kind.

I have also recently co-founded a community organization called Projet Bleuét (www.projetbleuet.ca), which works with Montreal based educators and individuals who are interacting with youth in an auxiliary settings and are seeking the proper tools to deal with challenging behaviour. We provide these tools in a series of workshops, each focusing on one of three themes: Anti-Oppression/Discrimination, Sports and Inclusivity, and Challenging Behaviour. The workshops are designed on the basis of consent-based practices, active listening tactics, as well as crisis management techniques and universal design.

I am interested in becoming a COCo board member not only because of my strong passion in working for and with community organizations, but because I deeply enjoy and am familiar with the 'visioning' phase of organizational planning. I am also committed to building a life and community here in Montreal. The more I become involved in various projects and learn about overlapping influences in the social sector, the more I feel inspired by the collaborative nature of this city, and how truly vibrant this sectors is. COCo's ability to tie these intersections together is really what I see as its most compelling trait and why I want to contribute to its development and future success.

Anurag Dhir

My first enduring taste of what has been an enjoyable and challenging life in the community sector came in 2004 when I worked at Santropol Roulant. I was there first as Kitchen Coordinator and later as a filmmaker working with over 50 volunteer to create a moving picture love letter that screened at the Roulant's fundraising event in December of that year. Much of what I have learned about community organizing, social justice principles and active citizenship I learned there and continue to apply in my current work. The people I met while at the Roulant are still part of my network of friends and colleagues—many who still work in the community sector—and many still credit our time there as formative and a catalyst for broadening our critical consciousness and engagement.

Since 2004 I have worked in the community sector in diverse ways including organizing, education, facilitation, filmmaking and journalism.

My current role as Community Engagement Coordinator at [McGill's Social Equity and Diversity Education Office \(SEDE\)](#) provides a unique opportunity to initiate and support further active learning on what it means to engage with one's community, to connect the personal with the political, and to critically reflect on volunteering as both a deconstructive and reproductive act. We do this by developing community-driven curricular and co-curricular volunteer programs and projects that allow students, staff and faculty to connect with communities of which they are a part and to engage in dialogue that positions their engagement in the larger systemic and structural challenges that create inequalities and make community organizations necessary.

In regards to other networks that could be relevant to COCo members, I am a founding board member for the [ECOLE Project](#), a space that facilitates a culture of sustainability at McGill University and in surrounding communities through research, teaching, experimentation, intentional living practices, and collaboration between student and community groups. Since 2012, I have been a member of the [Riverview Community Learning Centre](#) Partnership Committee, and since 2013 a member of the Steering Committee for the [Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning](#) (CACSL). Since 2006, I have moderated numerous public conversations for the [University of the Streets Café](#).

My connection with COCo dates back to 2006 when friends and former colleagues were part of the staff and board, experimenting with innovative ways to build capacity for community organizations. Having attended COCo AGMs and workshops, I have always been inspired by COCo's approach to organizational development, facilitation and popular education. I feel that my experience in community-university relations, community-sector program development and social justice education can support initiatives to further develop links with post-secondary institutions and community-based action research opportunities. My community-sector experience has thrived on creative collaboration and I welcome the opportunity to work with COCo members in hubs and labs to put ideas to practice.

I am currently completing an M.A. in Education and Society in the Department of Integrated Studies of Education at McGill, where my research directly impacts and is informed by my work at SEDE and interest in experiential learning, youth mentorship and popular education.

Ariel Harlap

I, Ariel Harlap, am eager to contribute to the evolution and positive impact of COCo by leveraging my experience with and passion for human-centred design, active citizenship, organizational strategy, and social entrepreneurship.

I have contributed to and co-organized various citizen-led movements in Montreal, notably 100in1day (promoting active citizenship) and Transformation Zone (gameified local urbanism), and continue to participate in the evolution of MuseomixMTL (prototyping participatory museums), Techno-Culture Club (uniting diverse communities to spark emergent techno-culture projects), and Ouishare Montreal (nurturing and connecting the collaborative economy). I joined the board of the Montreal Urban Ecology Centre this year, inspired to contribute to their financial sustainability and goals for promoting more active citizenship and participatory democracy in Montreal. Throughout these networks, I have often found myself to be one of the few cultural-anglophones amidst the groups, and thus would gladly offer to create new language bridges for COCo.

I have over 5 years of professional experience in project management and organizational strategy, and another 4 years in geosciences and research. Presently, I provide organizational counselling on human-centred design and strategy for times of growth and change. My management and organizational experience would serve me well in providing human resource policy advice to COCo board, whereas my entrepreneurship and social enterprise experience may serve to develop new opportunities for financing COCo's activities.

My personal goal is to offer my skills and work with others to create more resilient, connected and equitable communities and organizations in Montreal, at least that's the urban society I dream of, and thus I feel closely aligned with COCo's mission to strengthen our community.

Carol Fraser

Hi! My name is Carol and I'm excited about joining the COCo Board of Directors because I've been volunteering and working in non-profits in Montreal for the better part of the last decade and the organizations I've worked with have greatly benefited from COCo's initiatives and resources. I'm looking forward to sharing and growing my skills related to human resources, budgeting, policy development and integrating anti-oppression practice into organizations. I'm one of those people who genuinely enjoys Board & committee meetings and the work that comes out of them, and I've been told I've got a pretty good sense of humour, so I think I'd be a pretty good addition to COCo's Board.

My past experience in community work has been at CKUT as the Chair of the Board of Directors, where I helped with policy work and revamping the by-laws, as well as a Strategic Plan for the future of the station. I've also been a volunteer at food-justice related organizations such as Santropol Roulant, and worked at Midnight Kitchen and McGill Farmers' Market in coordinator positions. One of my greatest passions is for accessible organic agriculture so in the summers you'll often find me digging in the dirt somewhere near Montreal, or attending a farmers' conference. My other passion is Montreal's wonderful arts and culture scene, so you might see me at a sweaty punk show or hear me on the FM dial.

Diana Lombardi

I have been working and doing activism in the field of “l’action communautaire autonome” for close to 15 years, mainly within women’s groups. While I am an English speaker, I have been working all these years in a unilingual French environment. Therefore, I am quite connected to French-speaking Montréal-based community and social movements.

I have been admiring the mission and network of COCo “from afar” for quite some time. I always felt that it would be beneficial for everyone if Montréal anglo and franco community groups worked together more frequently. However, I do understand the barriers (cultural and organizational) that can make this bridge difficult to cross – for both parties. Interestingly, I often feel like I am invested in this need to help build this bridge... even though I know very little of the English network of groups and social movements in Montréal. In any case, here I am pitching my profile to COCo and to its members. I am hoping that my contribution to COCo will help add to the efforts already made to build this bridge a little further, a little stronger. I am excited to learn more about COCo’s work and different strategies.

I currently work as the coordinator of Réseau d’action des femmes en santé et services sociaux, a feminist “regroupement” of over 45 women’s groups in Montréal. I am quite connected to the health and social services network as well as other networks and movements. Through my work (and my personal activism), I am heavily involved in the anti-austerity struggle (Mains Rouges) as well as the actions of the World March of Women.

I have accumulated significant experience in community organization, network building, financial management (for non-profits), feminist analysis of government or social policies, applying for grants, social justice advocacy, “education populaire” and mobilization of members/volunteers/communities. I also have a keen interest in communications, anti-oppression work and the dynamics at play within community groups and networks (notably within democratic structures and systems or management styles).

Jonathan Lapalme

Dear COCo,

I just recently moved back to Montreal after having spent the past two years working around issues of social justice, active citizenship, democracy and socio-economic development in New York. However, since I know far less about the work being done around those issues here in Montreal and because New York is facing similar but more acute crises than Montreal in many cases, I think that my participation on the board of COCo could be a very reciprocal experience of learning and growth.

Before moving to New York, I have to admit that my education background and positionality at the time did not allow me to make those preoccupations explicit enough to fully engage with them. But because I grew up in a very suburban and Québécois family as a white queer man, I now consider having a wide range of frames of reference that could contribute to COCo's mission. In order to challenge those frames of reference and gain more perspective, I believe we need to look at the inequalities between English and French Canadians before the Quiet Revolution, and compare them with the inequalities between Québécois and people of color and immigrant populations today in Montréal. I think it is essential to make Québécois realize the privileges they gained since the 1960s in order to ensure that they do not create for others the circumstances they themselves fought against not so long ago.

For the past few years of studying and working mostly in the United States, but also briefly in Cambodia, Thailand, Colombia, Germany, Bosnia, and Italy, I got the opportunity to deepen my understanding of many of the core principles of COCo's mission from a spatial perspective, or what I (and many others) refer to as spatial justice. Influenced by different thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre, I have come to think of the urban not so much as a built form, but as a series of uneven socio-political and economic processes that shape the built fabric of our cities.

Starting with the concept of the production of space, I would like to create opportunities with COCo to better support existing and budding social justice movements, your first strategic direction, which relates very well to what is often coined as a global urban uprising. Inspired by the work of many "disturbanists" in the world, I believe the spatial justice lens could deepen the critical introspection and broader socio-economic analysis COCo has been focusing on in the past few years. Furthermore, I am involved on many initiatives at the moment that could become such opportunities for COCo.

I am grateful for your consideration and welcome further conversation with you.

Juniper Belshaw

I first encountered COCo in 2011, when I participated in a thought-provoking, challenging, and effective anti-oppression training for community groups. Since then, through multiple positive encounters, I remain convinced of COCo's important role in strengthening the community sector and advancing social justice by offering learning opportunities, increasing dialogue, breaking down silos, and making organizational development and training accessible to Quebec non-profits. I would be honoured to serve on COCo's Board of Directors, and to contribute my skills, experience, and enthusiasm in order to further the mandate of this crucial organization.

For the past six years, I have worked in Montreal nonprofits such as Head & Hands, Dans la rue, and McGill University's Union for Gender Empowerment. As a proud member of Montreal's queer community, I currently volunteer with queer and trans* youth at Project 10, and have also volunteered at CKUT Radio and the Ste. Emilie Skillshare. These experiences have deepened my commitment to building community services and movements that are informed by anti-oppressive practice, by-us-for-us organizing, open communication, and integration into larger social justice struggles.

My non-profit experience has given me skills in that I believe would be an asset on the COCo Board of Directors. At Head & Hands, I worked for four years as Fundraising & Development Coordinator, which gave me a keen understanding of Quebec's funding landscape and a commitment to community-based fundraising. For the past nine years, I have worked in collaborative and collective structures, and have experience in meeting, workshop, and retreat design and facilitation, policy development, human resources, financial management, administration, project design, and evaluation. In my current work at Geeta Nadkarni Media Inc., I have honed my skills in PR and communications, and am interested in harnessing the media to strengthen social justice struggles and amplify marginalised voices.

As those who have worked with me can attest, I am an enthusiastic collaborator who brings optimism, accountability, and hard work to all that I do. I would be thrilled to bring my skills and energy to the COCo Board, and am genuinely excited to collaborate with and learn from the other members of this necessary organization.

Laura Damecour

I am a bilingual fourth year law student at McGill University with experience in community-based work and a keen interest in social justice.

Originaire du Nouveau-Brunswick, j'habite Montréal depuis 10 ans. Depuis mon arrivée je me suis impliquée dans ma communauté en tant que bénévole, stagiaire et employée pour divers organismes communautaires dont le Santropol Roulant, la Porte Jaune Générations, la Clinique d'information juridique du Centre communautaire gais et lesbiennes de Montréal, la Clinique d'information juridique à McGill et la Clinique juridique du Mile End.

Through these experiences, I have taken part in strategic planning exercises and program auditing, created partnerships between community organizations and health and social service agencies, coordinated communication and fundraising initiatives, provided different services to a wide range of service users, trained volunteers, etc. I am therefore well aware of the needs and challenges in the community sector and how COCo provides essential services. In fact, on several occasions, I had the opportunity to benefit from COCo's services and witnessed first-hand the value of the work being done. Empowering community organizations and their staff members by providing the right tools and information reflects the kind of community I want to contribute to and be a part of.

I am particularly interested to contribute my experience and resourcefulness to improve access to legal information for community organizations and their staff members. With networks in the legal community and at the McGill Faculty of Law, I hope to create new and sustainable partnerships. In addition, I am particularly interested in COCo's anti-oppressive approach to community work and community-based action research. I strongly believe that reflexivity is key to growing as an organization.

As an aspiring legal professional with a creative mind and as a past COCo service user, I believe that I can contribute to the organization in concrete and meaningful ways. COCo's work and mission reflect my personal and professional values and it would be a privilege to be able to give back.

Au plaisir de vous rencontrer! / Looking forward to meeting you!

Rana Alrabi

Hi, I'm Rana Alrabi, an engaged member of the Montreal community and cultural fabric. I am driven by values of compassion, community, and respect and upholding of universal rights of all living beings. My motivation for applying to join the Board of the Centre for Community Organizations this year is to join a family of organisations and of people who are committed to promoting an inclusive and positive social change. I would like to invest my expertise in public relations, working with organisations and insitutions, and journalism to strengthen and embolden COCo's impact in building strong communities.