

SHARED PRACTICE GUIDE 002 – VOLUNTEERING**Rev 03****Introduction**

This learning guide is a vehicle to share knowledge between the u3as in the London Region. It's created by pulling knowledge and experiences from those u3as. They are only a guide – what worked for one u3a might not work for your u3a. If, in your experience, something is wrong in this Shared Practice Guide (SPG) or you disagree with something, please tell us to allow an update to be created and published. It's hoped these guides will grow over time with more shared learning.

Scope

This SPG covers the aspect of getting Members of a particular u3a to volunteer to help in the organising and running of that u3a. This can be volunteering for a short term, one off events (e.g. helping at an Open Day) or be a longer term (e.g. being a Trustee on the relevant u3a's Executive Committee). Hence, it is hoped this Guide will help u3as to find successors for its groups, committee and other roles.

Background

Generally, u3as find it difficult to get members to assist in running of their u3as. Many members express gratitude for those that do volunteer to help run things, but don't feel either able or obliged to contribute themselves.

Learnings

See also the Third Age Trust material on this subject as referenced in the following section.

The following material, from a LRU3A Delegates meeting, reflects the collective views and experiences expressed there.

Practices that work:

- Catch them early - invite new members to tea parties, or wine and cheese, to explain u3a ethos and discuss individually why they want to join and what they can offer their u3a. Provide a detailed induction. Emphasise that the organisation is entirely dependent on volunteers.
- Organise regular Interest Group Convenors/Coordinators/Leaders training sessions and lunches and encourage them to discuss their problems and support and encourage them. Get them to think about cultivating a successor.
- Appoint a Deputy for each Interest group to assist the Convenor, share the load, and simultaneously get the training required to convene a group of their own.
- 'Showcase' an Interest Group to advertise what Convenors and their groups do to encourage others to come forward.
- Define a specific task, then ask for a volunteer, rather than a general call out for volunteers
- A personal approach (one to one chat) is always more successful than a general appeal at meetings, in a newsletter or on a website. But do both.
- Make personalised emails in mailshots (through Beacon), Dear, so that members feel recognised.
- Reward volunteers, demonstrate recognition and value their efforts. Food and drink work well and small tokens of esteem – flowers and chocolates.

- Mention names of volunteers at general meetings – to give them public recognition but also so other members can relate to them, to the task. ‘If they can do it, so can I!’
- Consider providing an annual award for the most proactive members to promote and recognise volunteering.
- Threaten to dissolve the u3a if key posts are not filled. Have an ‘empty chair’ at general meetings to make the visual impact of a vacancy.
- Make an ex-Chair or ex-Executive Committee member an Honorary President, in order to retain expertise accumulated over previous years.

Problems raised:

- u3a should better publicise the self-help ethos of the organisation. It is NOT a service or care provider. The committee is NOT paid staff.
- Difficult getting new committee members and a diverse type of volunteer.
- Dearth of men and minorities volunteering.
- Members reluctant to take on responsibility of legal trustee and increasing responsibility for disabled members.
- Dealing with difficult members and difficult personality clashes.
- Finding willing volunteers to start new Interest Groups.
- Finding adequate opportunities and rewards to recognise volunteers.

Executive Committees:

- Look to provide new blood on the committee, constant turnover. Appoint some to specific roles and others as generalists to take on roles as and when required.
- Set up sub-committees, encouraging non-committee members to be involved. Ask committee to have helpers to support small tasks.
- Circulate Role Descriptions – recruit to specific roles.
- Invite observers to committee meetings.
- Approach willing volunteers personally to ascertain their availability.
- Point u3as to guidance and policies for dealing with problems.
- Organise occasional social events to build informal relationships.

Attracting Volunteers:

- Create a Volunteer Organiser on the committee, looking out for members with useful skills and ideas to shed the load.
- Focus on quality rather than quantity of volunteers and approach men and minorities not represented.
- Have a strategy or policy for dealing with difficult u3a members.
- Set up buddy systems. And provide an unthreatening induction or shadowing of existing volunteers for newcomers.
- Set up volunteers to meet and greet members at monthly meetings, make teas, organise specific events and other small roles to advocate for the u3a.
- Create inclusive social occasions for all members, particularly Christmas and Summer events and discussions when members can provide ideas and solutions, not only the committee.

Reference Material

There is quite good guidance on this subject on the Third Age Trust’s website [here](#).