

Best Practice Document for Facilitating Groups

INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to be used as a reference guide or handbook. How much of it you read or use will depend on how long you have been facilitating a group, where the group is held and what type of activities the group does. The Facilitating Groups and On-going Tasks and the Policies and Procedures Sections are relevant to all Group Convenors.

In simple terms, this document outlines the steps to be taken before setting up and running a successful new group. It also acts as a useful reference guide or handbook for all facilitators of group which are running at present

BACK TO BASICS

Interest groups are the life blood of the u3a and each group will develop its own structure. It is important however, that your group follows the u3a ethos of shared, participative and self-help learning. The result will then be not only an increase in knowledge, but a supportive and friendly atmosphere which enables everyone to participate.

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How you perceive your Role

People who help create interest group are known by various titles and how you perceive your role will influence how the group functions and the member's expectations. Do you perceive yourself as a:

- Group Leader
- Facilitator
- Convenor
- Manager
- Organiser

The Self-help Learning Principle

- Members form interest groups covering as wide a range of topics and activities as they desire; by the members, for the members.
- No qualifications are sought or offered. Learning is for its own sake, with enjoyment being the prime motive, not qualifications or awards.
- There is no distinction between the learners and the teachers; they are all u3a members.

Participative Learning and Learning Styles

'Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.'

Benjamin Franklin

'Every accomplishment starts with the decision to try'. Anon

The value of the U3A style of learning is that everyone can contribute and by doing so will gain a feeling of self-worth and integration. We all learn in different ways. Variation in content, method and style can make the learning experience more vibrant and appealing. Many of us will have particular skills but most of us will use a combination of the following: -

Visual: using written words, pictures, diagrams, images and spatial understanding.

Auditory: using sounds, rhythm, music, spoken presentations and discussions.

Physical/kinaesthetic: using hands, body, senses and acting things out.

Logical/Mathematical: using logic, systems, sequences, data, and statistics.

Social: learning as part of a group, sharing experiences and explaining your understanding to others.

Solitary: studying on your own.

Consider the following options:

A visiting speaker: A one-off visiting paid speaker, non-paid tutor or someone from another interest group or U3A.

Group member presentations: A short presentation by a member of the group or a member leading the meeting on a specific topic.

Discussion groups: Some activities will lead to discussion e.g. 'What the papers say', 'which way does water go down the plug hole – and why?'

Project based: A project chosen by the members. Each person (or pair) allocated an area of research which they bring to the group. This can be a good way to learn new technology.

Practical work: This might lean towards specific subjects such as science, craft, photography, creative writing, story-telling.

Drama: Create a short sketch. Provide some entertainment for your monthly meeting.

Themes: Have an event or presentation linked to a specific topic.

Liaise with a school or community group: E.g. local history presentation, art exhibition, debate.

Liaise with other organisations: Museums, universities, libraries. Very useful for Shared Learning Projects.

Shared Learning Projects: These are opportunities to work on short term projects with other U3As or outside organisations. They usually involve research and have a definite outcome.

Study days and workshops: Plan one for your own members or as part of a local network. E.g. Family History Day, Language day, Story-telling workshop, debate, quiz, music.

Online learning: MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses), YouTube 'How to' videos, Future Learn.

SETTING UP A NEW GROUP

Thank you for considering organising an interest group. We are sure you will find it very rewarding, however, it might seem a bit daunting initially. This information is intended to provide advice and support with this.

First Steps

- Contact the Group Coordinator for an initial discussion.
- Access the National U3A website <https://www.u3a.org.uk> and under the LEARN tab, select SUBJECT ADVICE to see if there are any hints or tips from other members who have set up a similar group.
- Again, on the National U3A website, under the SUPPORT FOR u3as tab you can find further information on Interest Groups and the role of the Group Convenor. (NB: You will have to create an account in order to access this information; this is straight forward, you just need a username and a password).
- Consider what interest there might be in the subject perhaps by some informal soundings.
- Consider what the aims of the group are – what are you hoping to learn/achieve/share by offering the group?
- Is there an existing Subject Advisor who can support you with ideas for the development of the group? An alternative to Subject Advisers might be to contact

neighbouring U3As to see if they have a similar subject group and then talk to the group leader to get some first-hand knowledge. It may be that you could sit in on a group meeting.

- Generate interest by promoting your group using as many different methods as possible. This could include publicity in the form of a flyer, poster, promotion via existing groups, via our newsletter, talking to members in groups that you attend. The more methods you use, the more successful you are likely to be.
- Complete a '*Proposed New Group Interest Form*' (available from the Group Coordinator or on our website <https://staustellu3a.org> under the Group Admin tab detailing the aims and objectives of the proposed group, suggested frequency of meetings and venue. Email or hand the completed form to the Group Coordinator. At the next Monthly Meeting, the completed '*Proposed New Group Interest Form*' will be placed on the notice board and the proposed group will be announced during the meeting. The sign-up sheet will remain on the board for a month to cover both a Monthly Meeting and a Coffee Morning. '*The Proposed New Group Interest Form*' will be passed to the Website/Marketing Manager so that the group can be publicised under the 'coming soon' section and a write-up can be included in the next Newsletter.
- Contact the Group Coordinator who will get in touch with the Beacon Administrator on your behalf to arrange a Beacon log-on and some basic training. You or one of the group members will be responsible for inputting group members' details onto BEACON, sending bulk emails via the system and maintaining group details on a regular basis.
- Once the closing date for expressions of interest is reached discuss the next steps with the Group Coordinator.
- Identify what you want to achieve from your first meeting.
- Organise an initial meeting and invite people to attend.

Venues

- If you are planning to use the St Austell Arts Centre, please contact the Arts Centre Manager (01726 72685) or the Group Coordinator to check what days, times and rooms are available and establish a date for an initial informal meeting of the proposed group ideally within a month of the closing date above.
- If you are considering using an external venue, please contact the Group Coordinator so that a visit can be arranged and a Venue Risk Assessment Form filled out, (there is a copy of this on our website <https://staustellu3a.org> under the Group Admin tab.
- The u3a does not fund room hire charges for external venues. If you wish to use an external venue you are responsible for sourcing the venue, agreeing room hire, paying the venue direct and recovering costs from Group Members by charging an appropriate subscription for each meeting to ensure that all costs can be met at all times (consider collecting members' subscriptions in advance).
- Contact our Treasury Team for advice on the Financial Procedures for running your group, this is particularly relevant if you run your group at the Arts Centre as you will be requested to take payments via Pre-Payment Cards (PPCs) as well as cash and will need to know your group code before making BACS/Cheque payments to the Treasury Team.

- Most meetings are currently held at the St Austell Arts Centre. U3A pays an annual fee for room hire; a nominal fee is collected from group members at every group meeting held in the building, which is used to offset the annual fee. See Appendix 1 – Notes to New and Existing Group Convenors for Arts Centre Hire.
- If you use an external venue, you must check that the venue has Public Liability Insurance (an Insurance Certificate should be displayed within the building); inform the Group Coordinator of the outcome. Public Liability Insurance covers things like trips, falls, burns, damage to property etc. so will be linked to the building not the business or organisation using it unless they are renting the whole building then they need their own Public Liability Insurance.
- Consideration needs to be given to the size of a group and whether any equipment will be needed, e.g. projector, screen etc.
- Check what disability access the venue has and inform the Group Coordinator of the outcome.
- If the manager of an external venue asks to see a copy of U3A's insurance, contact the Group Coordinator.
- Do not sign any outside rental agreement; pass a copy to the Group Coordinator for the Committee to deal with it.

Next Steps

Inform interested members of the date / time / venue of the initial informal meeting via a bulk email sent through BEACON. Telephone any interested member who does not have an email address; the icon below will show against a member's name in BEACON if they do not have an email address.



- Remind members to bring their Membership Cards and their PPCs (Pre-Payment Cards) or room charge in cash along if the group is to be held at the Arts Centre

Risk Assessment Forms

- Contact the Group Co-Ordinator to check which Risk Assessment Forms you need to fill in. These will be the forms relevant to the activities your group plan to do and are a requirement for National u3a Insurance Compliance. For example:
 - Venue Risk Assessment Checklist (U3A-KMS-FRM-002)
 - Venue Day of Use Checklist (for Groups meeting in Member's homes) (U3A-KMS-FRM-011)
 - Walk Leader Risk Assessment Checklist (U3A-KMS-FRM-012)
 - Workshop Activity Risk Assessment Checklist (for workshops involving use of tools, machinery and appliances) (U3A-KMS-FRM-013)
 - COVID Risk Assessment Forms (Personal Risk Assessment Form) <https://staustellu3a.org> under the Group Admin tab.

The First Meeting

Recommended steps to take at the first meeting:

- Introduce yourself and confirm the purpose of the group as you see it.
- Ask about the skills within the group.
- Agree the tasks that need doing to run the group and who is willing to support these – identify who is willing to help with the programme or keep the register (attendance record). A copy of the Attendance Record is available on our website <https://staustellu3a.org> under the Group Admin tab.
- Agree, if relevant, the level that the group will be aimed at – beginners, improvers, advanced.
- Agree how the group will work – discussion, instruction, presentation etc.
- Agree when and where the group will run.
- Identify any accessibility needs that group members may have.
- Agree the costs for running the group, what members will pay and how they will pay.
- Agree some ground rules e.g.
 - Be punctual
 - Listen to each other
 - Allow others to speak
 - Let someone know if you are unable to come
 - Agree to disagree amicably and be respectful to other group members
 - Every contribution matters
 - Have patience with and encourage those who are slower to learn
 - Not attending if you are feeling unwell
 - Taking a Lateral Flow Test if appropriate
- Discuss what the refreshment arrangements will be. Currently whilst COVID transmission rates are still high, the advice is to bring your own refreshments along.
- Following the initial informal meeting, provide a short description of what has been agreed for the group (to include day/time/frequency/venue/cost) to the Group Coordinator, who will forward it to the Website Manager.
- A new group can apply to the Committee for a one-off set up grant. If the grant is approved any equipment/items bought remain the property of the u3a and should be returned to the Group Coordinator if the group disbands.

FACILITATING GROUPS AND ON-GOING TASKS

- Contact the group members a few days before each group meeting to remind them about the date and time and let them know if relevant, what you will be focussing on at the next meeting and if they need to bring anything with them to participate.

- Arrive early to give yourself time to organise the room, set out tables, equipment, etc. before members arrive and currently whilst COVID transmission rates are still high, it is a good idea to wipe the tables down before and after the group.
- Ensure the room you used is returned to how it was before you arrived.
- Introduce any new members to the group.
- Familiarise yourself and advise the group of the Fire Evacuation Procedures for the building and the room you are holding the group in.
- Make sure you know the postcode of the venue you are using in case you need to contact the Emergency Services
- Keep copies of all Attendance Record Forms (Registers) safely, these may be needed for Track and Trace purpose or for Insurance purposes should the need arise.
- Each u3a group is required to record attendance at every meeting for insurance purposes, fire regulations, checking of U3A membership and as an audit trail for financial checks. Group Convenors are responsible for ensuring a '*Group Attendance Record*' is completed for each meeting and for passing/transferring any relevant group fees to the Treasury Team.
- Check that group members have paid their annual subscription (if they haven't renewed their membership their name will show in red font in BEACON).
- Ideally members should wear their u3a lanyards and carry their PPCs (Pre-Payment Cards) when attending meetings; the membership card will change colour each year to confirm they have renewed their membership.
- Non u3a members can come to a Coffee Morning or one main Monthly Meeting and attend one individual group event where no pre-booking or payment is required, before deciding whether to join. Group Convenors should record their attendance as a guest on the '*Group Attendance Record*'.
- Group Convenors of self-financing groups should:
 - Never open a bank account to hold u3a funds
 - Never apply for grants.
 - Never put members' money into personal account.
 - Avoid cash where possible but give a receipt if you have to take it.
 - If you do hold cash, ensure you do not exceed any limit laid down by St Austell u3a (this is currently £30.00) and follow any current guidelines for paying in cash.
 - Get receipts where possible when you hand money over.
 - If you are finding that you are using your own credit card to pay for group events consult the Treasury Team for advice
 - If you need to buy-in services or goods for your Group (such as coach transport) you need to inform the Committee that you are going to do this and you will need to obtain two quotes.
 - Report to our Treasury Team as regularly as requested
- If you have a member who is not able to cope independently, inform the Group Coordinator. Please note that members may bring a carer along if they need to do so, the carer will attend the group for free, but will be expected to pay for any tickets, refreshments or other costs.
- Contact any member who has stopped attending without informing you, or, if unable to contact, let the Outreach Team know. The Outreach Team can check if

the member has also stopped attending other groups and give the member a call to check that everything is OK.

- Keep the group member information on Beacon up-to-date
- Keep the Group Coordinator advised of any changes to the group venue, (including change of room at the Arts Centre), day(s) held or time started/finished or cancelled meetings so that the Website Manager can be informed and the group information and calendar can be amended and kept up-to-date.
- Regularly send the Website Manager information about what the group is doing, this can be photos, videos, what book the group is reading etc.

Problem Solving

Sometimes issues can arise within a group that disrupt the smooth running and spoil the enjoyment for everyone. Don't leave a problem too long before trying to resolve it. Talk to the Group Coordinator or a Committee Member if you are unsure how to resolve the problem or just want someone to explore options with. If you have a serious problem in a session it is quite acceptable to ask a member to leave, but please contact the Group Coordinator or a Committee Member as soon as possible after the end of the session.

Issues between Group Members

Where there is potential for friction it is advisable to begin by bringing it into the open. Either you or another person could try to facilitate a discussion either with the members concerned or with the whole group, but it is important that the facilitator remains neutral and non-judgemental. If you cannot reach a resolution informally speak to your Group Coordinator or a Committee Member. If a situation does not resolve and becomes acrimonious your Committee can consult the advice on disciplinary procedure provided by the Trust. There are also Trust Volunteers (National u3a) trained to support with resolving disputes.

Accident/Incident Reporting

In the case of any accident or incident, an 'Incident Report Form' must be completed or a detailed report sent to the Committee, including details of any witnesses. There is a copy of the Incident Report Form on our website <https://staustellu3a.org> under the Group Admin tab.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The Committee and/or Group Coordinator will advise you of the u3a Insurance arrangements as well as policies and procedures that you need to be aware of. These will include matters concerning:

WhatsApp Groups – The Legalities

If you use a WhatsApp group, to comply with Data Protection and Privacy regulations you must inform members that their phone numbers will be visible to all other members

of the WhatsApp group. The group must be maintained. If a member ceases to be a group member or a u3a member they must be immediately removed from the group.

Copyright

St Austell u3a hold a CLA Education Licence which allows copying of materials for u3a groups within certain limits. For more information please check the Advice section on the National u3a website <https://www.u3a.org.uk> document U3A-KMS-DOC-009. If you run your group at the Arts Centre you are covered by the Arts Centre's Music and Film licences, for other venues please check with the Group Coordinator or the Committee.

Policies

Please familiarise yourself with our Policies, these are on our website <https://staustellu3a.org> under the Policies Tab. These are updated when required and you will be notified via our Newsletter when there is an update. Our policies are:

- Accessibility (Group Convenors, in liaison with the Accessibility Officer, need to consider anticipatory reasonable adjustments to overcome accessibility issues and what steps they may need to take to meet access and inclusion requirements. Each group will be reviewed on an individual basis as certain groups may require a certain level of fitness or mobility and members need to be made aware of this in advance
- Data Protection
- Privacy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Safeguarding

There is also a PowerPoint Presentation available on our website covering Data Protection and Privacy Regulations available if you would like more information on this topic.

HELP AND SUPPORT

All St Austell Committee Members and Members with Committee Support Roles can be contacted via our website <https://staustellu3a.org> under the Contact Us tab.

APPENDIX 1

Venue Hire Notes for New and Existing Group Convenors using The St Austell Arts Centre

For groups using the Art Centre as a base for their events, we have secured a block booking. There may be still be rooms available, so if you would like to use the Arts Centre please liaise with the Group Coordinator to see what rooms we can offer you.

All members attending a group event at the Arts Centre are required to pay a meeting fee which we use as a contribution to the annual rent. This is currently £1.00 per meeting and can be paid in cash or via your PPC (Pre-Payment Card).

The Treasury Team has moved the financial programme to a cashless basis, BACS bank transfers and card payments have been set as the new way forward, cheques will be accepted in the interim but cash cannot be handed to the Treasury team).

As a Group Convenor, it is your responsibility to ensure at each group meeting that every attendee is a bona fide member - this is an **ESSENTIAL PROCEDURE** to ensure that you as a group leader are covered by our insurance. This cover will also extend for all members of our u3a attending the interest group/event. By allowing a non-member to attend this could invalidate our insurance and put you and our members at risk.

The only exceptions to this are if a group member is attending the group as a free taster session prior to joining us as a member or if a member brings a carer with them. In these cases, the guest or carer needs to be added to the Group Attendance Record as a Guest or a Carer and will not be required to pay the £1.00 room hire contribution; guests and carers will be covered by the National u3a insurance policy.

How is the meeting fee to be paid?

By marking the member's PPC (Pre-Payment Card)

Should a Member not have their PPC with them, then another member can use their card to pay for them. Alternatively, Group Convenors can take cash, but this can only be transferred to the Treasury team by either BACS or cheque, to our main account:

20-30-47

Account No. 33697363

The reference to be used on the transfer or cheque is the group alpha code. For example, the Italian group alpha code is ITN. Some Group Facilitators sell PPC cards to the group members, in his case PPC needs to be added to the group alpha code so the code for Italian Group would be ITNPPC.

Prior to setting up your group you will need to obtain your group alpha code from the Treasury Team

Any new interest group that has not been in existence before can request a contribution for setting up the group from the Committee (prior to incurring any expenditure). The maximum contribution is £50. Any equipment or items bought with this money remain the property of St Austell u3a and should be returned to the Group Coordinator if the group disbands.

APPENDIX 2

Closure of the St Austell Branch of Barclays Bank

Following the closure of Barclays bank in St Austell there will be a new procedure for paying cheques into our accounts.

Group leaders who receive cheques from their group members will be required from 23rd June 2022 to make payments into our accounts via the **POST OFFICE**.

The use of the new procedure will relieve the Group Leader of having to make a special trip to the Bank or retain cheques before handing to the Treasury team. This has 2 benefits:

- (1) it enables the monies to be received into our accounts at the earliest possible opportunity
- (2) member's bank account will also show (a record) that the cheque has been presented.

The procedure you need to follow is set out below. This will ensure that all payments can be correctly allocated in our accounts

- (a) The Treasury team can issue Group Leaders with a supply of the required paying in envelopes and paying in slips. The paying in envelope will show the correct bank sort code and account number.

The Group Leader will only need to add their phone number to the paying in envelope.

A blank paying in slip will be in the envelope and must be completed and placed in the envelope together with the cheques. **PLEASE NOTE THAT CASH CANNOT** be included with this payment method.

- (b) After the envelope is delivered to the Post Office you will be required to email the Treasurer confirming
 - (i) Your group name and alpha code
 - (ii) The date the envelope is handed into the Post Office
 - (iii) The total amount (£) of the cheques
 - (iv) The purpose e.g. Pre-payment cards (PPC), event name, etc.