

## **SHARED PRACTICE GUIDE – VOLUNTEERING** **Rev 02**

### **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 write in 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 of event (eg helping at an Open Day) or be more longer term (eg being a Trustee on the relevant U3A's Executive Committee). Hence it is hoped this Guide will help U3As to find successors for it's 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.

There was a LRU3A Delegates meeting (January 2019) and this subject was discussed there. The shared findings from that session are listed here but are not developed further at this stage.

#### ***Practice that works:***

- 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. Emphasize that the organisation is entirely dependent on volunteers.
- Organise regular Convenors training sessions and Lunches, and encourage them to discuss their problems and support and encourage them.
- Organise a Showcase Interest Group meeting to advertise what Convenor Volunteers and their groups do.
- Appoint a Deputy for each Interest group to assist Convenor, share the load, and simultaneously get the training required to Convene a group of their own.
- Define a specific task, then ask for a volunteer, rather than a general call out for volunteers when commitment, nature of task and therefore skills required are not specified. A personal approach is always more successful than a general appeal at meetings, in newsletter or on website.
- Make personalised emails in mailshots (through Beacon), Dear ....., so that members feel recognised.
- Volunteers elect to be involved with specific projects, e.g. publishing a book of memoirs of group members.

- Reward volunteers, demonstrate recognition and value their efforts. Food and drink work well and small tokens of esteem – flowers and chocolates.
- Provide an annual award for the most proactive members to promote and recognise volunteering.
- Threaten to dissolve the U3A if key posts are not filled.
- Make ex-Chairs an Honorary President or Exec Committee member, 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.
- Getting new committee members and diverse Volunteers.
- Derth of men and minorities volunteer on committee and convene groups.
- 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 Job 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.
- Find problem solving strategies and policies for guidance in 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](#).

## **Contact Person**

At this stage, draft of this SPG, a contact person has not yet been selected. Once this has been done contact details will be added here.