

Guidelines for Convenors of Study Groups

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The purpose of these guidelines is to assist members to set up a new study group and with the intention of providing an effective process that benefits all members.

Starting a new Study Group

You may be an expert in your subject or you may simply wish to join with other similarly interested people to increase your knowledge of the topic. The process of facilitation in both cases is much the same. You don't need to be an expert to start a study group. All you need is an interest in the topic and a desire to learn more. Each meeting of the group requires a presenter and a host, and the person who undertakes these roles may change from meeting to meeting. The group also requires a contact person who in most cases is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the group and is the liaison between the U3A Study Group Coordinator (SGC) and the group.

When deciding on venues, consider access difficulties, car parking and numbers that can be accommodated. Other members of your study group may be able to take turns at hosting the group. Or you may consider hiring a public venue and sharing the costs between members.

Avoid the 4th Wednesday of each month in the mornings as General meetings and Committee meetings are held on these days. They are listed on the U3A Nelson website.

If you have an idea for a new group, ask for an opportunity to talk about your idea at a general meeting (or ask someone to talk for you) and let the SGC know so that it can be advertised on our website and described to new members.

Membership of Study Groups

Study group members need to register with the SGC before joining any group. The SGC provides the contact person with an up to date list of members and contact details. Selection for inclusion in a group is at the discretion of the SGC, as laid out in the U3A Roles document..

Running a Group

It is the group responsibility to ensure that no one member dominates the meeting and that all members have opportunity to have their say. Some groups put a time restriction on the time any single member can talk and a clock in the meeting room can provide a mechanism for moving onto the next speaker.

Occasionally awkward issues may arise eg:

- someone may not fit easily into a Group and the Convenor will feel uncomfortable with this person in the group.
- there may be some other issues which a member of the group may be uncomfortable with, and may feel they cannot bring it up

We urge Convenors or members in such instances to discuss this with the SGC who may be able to assist – for example they may be able to have a quiet word in a person's ear!

Membership

If a member applies to join a group and there is no space available the member's name will be placed on the waiting list until sufficient others constitute another group, or a vacancy develops. Once a member has become a member of a study group, they may stay in the group as long as they wish and/or as long as the group continues.

All members are free to apply to a new group when they wish, but must let the contact person know when they intend to leave so that the contact person can notify the SGC who can advertise the space on the website.

Vacancies in the groups are advised on the U3A Nelson website:

<http://www.u3anelson.org.nz> and members are informed of vacancies in the bi-monthly U3A Nelson newsletters.

From time to time a study group will be led by a non U3A member. When this happens one member of the group will be asked by the SGC to act as contact person. The duties of this person will be to convey messages from the non U3A study group leader to the appropriate U3A Committee person, to take messages from U3A to the group and to ensure that one member of the group is available to report on activities at general meetings or a written description for the newsletter.

Refreshments

Most study groups enjoy sharing refreshments during the course of their group meetings. Arrangements are over to each group.

Communications

Convenors may want to communicate with their members and may use the U3A system to do so. Go to <http://www.u3anelson.org.nz/mailler> [1st time:They need to enter their email address, then the code [ask the IT Coord for this you should copy and paste it into the box]. Lastly, to prove you are a human, [!] you need to put the 3 black lower case characters into the next box.] Thereafter you will not need to enter this data.

This system allows you to communicate with any or all of your members by checking the wee boxes beneath the text writing box. When the message has been typed and members selected, the SEND button is at the bottom of the page. You can add one pdf document too.

Quick Checklist for the Group

1. Refer any non registered members to the Study Group Coordinator. N. B Each group has complete discretion about welcoming occasional guests.
2. Liaise with the SGC and pass on U3A requests and information.
3. Administration tasks, hosting and presenting can be shared with other members of the group.
4. Members should be consulted on the material to be studied during the year.
5. Be flexible and change times and dates to suit if necessary.
6. At some stage during each session ensure the next meeting is planned, and, if appropriate, decide who is providing the refreshments.