

U3A Manawatū - Setting up a Group

If you have an interest you'd like to share with others, then you have the basis for establishing a group.

Your first step is to contact the Chair who will discuss options with you and may advertise in the quarterly newsletter for “expressions of interest”. At this stage, with the help of the Chair if you wish, you might want to consider a number of things such as:

- Whether an initial meeting is also required as a first step to “test the water” if you are unsure of possible interest.
- The minimum and maximum number you'd like your group to be or alternatively whether to make it an “open” group with no upper limit.
- When you'd like to meet – day and week(s) of the month; time; duration, etc.
- Possible venue
- Likely resources needed
- The “shape” of the meetings
- Safety issues

Deciding the size of the group

To some extent this will be determined by the kinds of activities intended. If you plan to base the activities around e.g., speakers, either yourself or other members or external, you can accommodate larger numbers. However, if the activities are based around e.g., discussion or practical sessions, you may have to restrict numbers. Available or preferred venues may also influence your decision.

Examples:

- NZ History uses speakers and meets in a larger venue so has no upper limit at this stage; Moreover, people come along or not depending on their interest in that month's topic.
- The book groups and Poetry for Pleasure involve discussion of each member's chosen literature so are limited to a number that can be comfortably covered in a two-hour slot and in their smaller venues.
- The size of Silver Screens is determined by the size of the private area where the movies are shown.

When to meet

U3A tries to accommodate all groups with as little overlap as possible to allow members the widest possible choices. However, as more people join, and more groups are established, this becomes increasingly difficult. Again, it is best to consult the Chair for advice about your preferred slot(s) or have a look at the Monthly Schedule on the Groups page of the website: <https://www.u3amanawatu.org.nz/learning-groups/>.

Meetings are usually monthly (e.g., first Monday of the month) but sometimes twice monthly (e.g., first and third Monday of the month). Generally, though, U3A groups meet for two to three hours, either in the morning (usually starting at 10.00 or 10.30 am) or afternoon (usually starting somewhere between 1.00 and 2.00 pm), and sometimes including a break for tea and coffee – or beginning or ending with this social get together. Although less common, evening or weekend meetings are also possible. Wednesday afternoon scheduling is discouraged to allow for general U3A activities such as the Seminars, as are fortnightly meetings because they fit uncomfortably into overall scheduling

Examples:

- NZ History begins at 10.00am with morning tea before starting the meeting itself at 10.30pm.
- For the Love of Plants, although meeting in the afternoon (1-3.30 pm) breaks halfway through when a “natural” break occurs between activities. An extra half hour is added to the two-hour meeting time for this purpose. Some two-hour meetings include the break within the two hours.
- Some groups adjourn after their meetings to a local café.
- Astronomy (when offered), meets, for obvious reasons, in the evening when it's dark.

Venues

Groups can operate in a variety of venues depending on preferences, size of group, cost, availability, etc. Many smaller groups meet in a member's home, usually the Coordinator's, which has the advantage of no cost, although no one should feel pressured to offer their home. There is an up-to-date list of possible Palmerston North venues at <https://www.pncc.govt.nz/Community/Venues-for-hire>. The Chair may also have some suggestions.

Resources

Many groups require no resources to operate successfully whereas others depend on these. The cost of a venue is, perhaps, the main item to consider but other costs may include stationery such as white board pens or chart paper, or DVDs, course materials, etc. Members already pay their U3A subscription to be able to join groups, but it is permissible to charge a small fee to cover these other costs – \$2 - \$3 per month is usual. Again, discuss this with the Chair if necessary. In terms of break refreshments, you may want to ask for a koha or draw up a roster for members to contribute at least the milk and biscuits, while you, perhaps, supply the tea, coffee and sugar.

U3A owns a video projector, two audio recorders, a DVD player, a blue tooth speaker and a portable screen which may be booked. Your initial contact for these is Stuart Birks at kstuartbirks@gmail.com or 021 204 7903.

Note that in 2025 the Committee agreed to contribute up to \$50 towards travel costs for an out-of-town speaker, or towards other expenses, e.g., video hire (not honoraria). Group Coordinators need to apply to the Committee via the Secretary or Chair and receipts will be required.

Safety and Wellbeing

As all group members are adults and can therefore be expected to be responsible for their own wellbeing, Coordinators need not worry unduly about this aspect. However, it is advisable to check out safe exits, that they're accessible and able to be opened in an emergency, also, the position of any fire extinguishers, location of toilets, etc. If you do not have a cell phone yourself it may be helpful to know who in the group does, in case 111 must be called. Basic common sense, such as would operate in any social situation, will be your main guide.

Note that if you use a private vehicle for U3A business, e.g., for a group trip, that vehicle is NOT covered by U3A insurance. We do not have a U3A vehicle.

Privacy

No Group Coordinator is permitted to release contact information in any form regarding their group members, either within or outside the group, without the member's permission. With respect to emails, you may need to use the BCC option (Blind Carbon Copy) which allows you to send a copy of an email to recipients whose email addresses are hidden from all other recipients.

Facilitator Support

As a Group Coordinator you become part of a network that supports your activities: Coordinator meetings are held twice a year to meet other Coordinators and the U3A Committee and to share ideas and help resolve problems and issues.

A mentor to assist with planning or running a group or to provide ideas may also be appointed on request. While this applies mainly for new Coordinators to 'find their feet'; that is, to provide support in gaining confidence, more established Coordinators may also request such input if they feel they'd like it. Gaining fresh ideas, or dealing with a difficult member or situation, may be a reason for such interventions. These interactions will be confidential only to the parties involved once the 'match' has been made.

So finally ... If you have an interest that isn't catered for already in the U3A, please seriously consider establishing a new group. Existing coordinators will certainly attest to how rewarding this is and it need not be a daunting undertaking. Consider whether you would be happy meeting with like-minded friends, perhaps over coffee, and talking about that interest informally. If your answer is "Yes" then you are "qualified" to begin a new U3A group. It's a lot of fun. Give it a go!