

Guide for Staff Supporting Peer Learning Facilitators in Public Libraries

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Notes on using this guide:

Start Here

Each section of this guide is tailored to a different role in the Peer Learning Service. This guide is a resource for libraries of all sizes. For some libraries, those roles may be handled by different people; for others, one person might do multiple roles.

To use it, first decide which of the following best describes your role(s) in bringing peer learning to your library:

Coordinator

The Facilitator Coordinator recruits, trains, and maintains a relationship with facilitators on behalf of the library. This person may continue to directly supervise the work of the facilitators or may hand off that responsibility to a Host. There will be only one Coordinator. The Coordinator is responsible for:

- Recruiting facilitators, including identifying, screening, and onboarding community members who are interested in learning to be facilitators.
- Using the provided program to train facilitators.
- Gathering needed clearances, agreements, and other paperwork required by the library, as determined by the Program Organizer.

Organizer

The program Organizer is responsible for establishing, evaluating, and marketing of the overall peer learning program for the library. The Organizer's work includes:

- Creating a plan to establish peer learning at a library, determining roles within the library system, setting guidelines and procedures for programming, and securing necessary support from all stakeholders.
- Implementing an external and internal communication plan to introduce peer learning programming to the library, the community, and potential facilitators.
- Selecting and scheduling evaluation measures for peer learning

Host

The Host is a frontline staff person who works directly with the community that will be learning. There should be as many Hosts as there are locations of volunteer-led adult learning. The Host will be responsible for:

- Day-to-day logistical support of facilitators, including reserving space, answering questions about library policies, hours, etc., and assisting with library technology.
- Promotion of programs in the community, especially by word-of-mouth recommendation to members of the community, and helping community members register for programs.

Regardless of whether you have a large project team or a project team of one, we recommend that those responsible for overseeing Peer Learning Service become familiar with all of the roles, then share the relevant sections with anyone who will be focusing on a particular role at your library.

Background

What is peer learning?

Peer Learning is a type of decentralized, non-formal learning that libraries can support using these resources.

Non-formal learning is:

Education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or a complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals.

<http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/non-formal-education>”

Another way to understand non-formal learning is to place it in the context of the other jargon used by people who study education. Formal education is school; informal education is learning something on the fly, such as watching a Youtube video to learn how to fix a flat. Non-formal learning is somewhere between those.

Peer Learning service in libraries is a type of non-formal learning that involves a learner or learners working with a trained facilitator. This approach does not require the facilitator to have expertise in the subject matter being learned. Topics, resources, pacing, and all other key decisions are based on a resource agreed on by the learner and facilitator.

Peer Learning can take a bunch of different forms. You may find that this guide is useful for establishing a few different modes of Peer Learning:

1. **Learning circles** are peer-led study groups guided by a particular online course or resource. In Learning Circles, regular attendance is required, clear individual goals are stated, and there is a set number of meetings with a beginning and end.
2. **Reading groups or discussion groups** are peer-facilitated discussions based on a particular reading, topic, or interest. Regular attendance is not required, a common theme is stated prior to each session, and there is no set number of meetings.

3. **Focus groups or reference panels** are peer-led meetings meant to receive feedback and input from local community members on a particular issue with the intent of taking action based on the feedback. The topic or theme is stated prior to the session, and there is a set number of meetings (often only one).
4. **Community conversations** are peer-led one-off events focused on discussing local issues without necessarily any intent to take action. The topic is stated prior to the session, and there is a set number of meetings (often only one).

Organizer

Before you can turn trained facilitators loose in the library, you will need to do some background work to make sure that your organization has the capacity to support a volunteer-led program of adult learning.

In this stage, you will need a champion who either has authority to make decisions on behalf of the library, or who is able to advocate for policy changes with those who do. This person will be your **Organizer**.

The steps involved in this stage are establishing need, building support, gathering your assets, creating your project team, and making an evaluation plan.

Establish need

Chances are, you have a good idea about learning needs that exist in your community, and about your library's current efforts to meet those needs. Before you get to work establishing a volunteer-facilitated adult learning in your library, gather evidence about your community's learning needs.

- IDEO's Design Thinking in a Day (one of many resources in the Design Thinking for Libraries) offers great resources for getting community input. Try the Define Your Challenge exercise.
- Use a talkback board to ask open or closed-ended questions of patrons who visit the library.
 - Open-ended questions
 - What would you like to learn?
 - What are you working on?
 - What would you like to discuss with your neighbors?
 - Closed-ended questions

- What technology/language/creative skills would you like to learn this year?
- Talk to partner organizations about the learning needs of the people they serve. Supporting learning on behalf of organizations that have complementary missions can be mutually beneficial.
 - Adult Literacy organizations
 - Educational institutions
 - Workforce organizations

Take any user input that you can gather and use it as you build support for this new service.

Building support

Once you have established a need for adult learning in your community, you will still need to consider if your organization has the will and capacity to maintain a program of volunteer-led adult learning. Is it a priority? Will it be supported by the entire organization?

- How is adult learning reflecting in your library's strategic goals and objectives?
 - If your library has a strategic plan, identify ways that community-facilitated adult learning can help you meet those goals. For example, adult learning can help with common strategic initiatives such as community conversations, lifelong learning, workforce and professional development, and creative learning.
 - Identify ways that volunteer-led programming might build capacity or increase efficiency.
 - Are library staff spending time creating programming that is outside of their skill-set?
 - Are there emerging learning needs in the community that would be best served by quickly-organized learning or discussion groups?
 - Is the community asking for programs on topics that your staff do not have expertise in?
 - Does your library currently offer classes that might be better suited to a less formal format?
- Does your library have procedures for working with volunteers? Become familiar with the best practices at your library.
 - Does your library allow volunteers to do programming?
 - How are volunteers screened?
 - Are volunteers required to have clearances?
- Does your library have the capacity to recruit and support facilitators?
 - Working with community members to facilitate does increase your programming capacity, but understand that supporting volunteers does take some time and effort.
 - Consider your plan for doing the following:
 - Recruiting

- Training
- Checking in
- Marketing
- Registration
- Set-up
- What assets do you have to make volunteer-led successful at your library?
 - Identify who will have the role of Organizer, Coordinator, and Host at your library.
 - One person can do two or even three of these roles; however, be sure that this person understands all of the roles, and commit the time.
 - Is your organization capable of recruiting and sustaining a relationship with a new group of volunteers? Remember, even though volunteers will contribute much of the time and expertise needed for the programs themselves, volunteer management requires a commitment of time and resources.
 - Where will you find potential candidates?
 - When will you schedule training?
 - When will you check in with volunteers?
 - Is your library ready to teach community members a different way of learning? Are your community members ready to learn?
 - Do you have access to website, blog, social media, or other media channels to share versions of the marketing content.
 - Will colleagues be comfortable helping community members understand new approaches to peer learning that may be different from traditional library programs? How will you help them learn?
 - Where in the library will the volunteer-led adult learning programs happen?
 - Do you have access to laptops, projectors, and any other technology or supplies needed for adult learning programs?

Take the information you gathered in this section to build support for volunteer-led adult learning at your library. With necessary approvals from organizational leadership, you will be ready to gather your team (or schedule time with yourself!) to get the project started.

Get started

With your organization's full support for volunteer-led adult learning, the project team or person tasked with implementing it can begin planning the first set of programs.

The Organizer has been responsible for the work so far, but now the Coordinator and Practitioner's work begins. If your project team includes others, begin with a kickoff meeting to go over the project team's responsibilities and develop a timeline. If you will be managing all aspects of this project yourself, set a timeline after you review the rest of this guide.

- ❑ Establish a target start date, and then plan the following milestones:
 - ❑ Three months from start:
 - ❑ Coordinator:
 - ❑ Recruit facilitators
 - ❑ All roles:
 - ❑ Begin marketing
 - ❑ Six weeks from start
 - ❑ Coordinator:
 - ❑ Train facilitators
 - ❑ Host:
 - ❑ Community engagement
 - ❑ Final month before start
 - ❑ Coordinator
 - ❑ Complete training
 - ❑ Transition volunteers to Host
 - ❑ Host
 - ❑ Meet the facilitators
 - ❑ Recruit participants
- ❑ Support the Coordinator and Hosts
 - ❑ Review this guide with anyone who will have those roles.
 - ❑ [Coordinator section]
 - ❑ [Host section]

Once the programs begin, the Organizer's tasks are focused on sustaining or growing the program. Revisit sections of this guide as you need to maintain the community of learning that facilitators, community members, and library staff will build with the results of your careful planning.

Evaluating Peer Learning programs

An important ongoing task for the Organizer is to oversee evaluation of volunteer-led adult learning for the organization. There are a couple of levels of evaluation to pay attention to. Input from individual learners can be useful for facilitators to help them make adjustments within a learning session. That same data, combined with data from other instances of learning, helps you understand how the program as a whole is (or is not) serving organizational goals.

Your evaluation plan will be based on your organization's practices and goals. The following resources are highly recommended:

- ❑ The P2PU platform uses a built-in evaluation tool that gets input from learners about their goals and experiences. Encourage facilitators to set aside time in learning sessions to allow people to fill this out.

- ❑ The Project Outcomes Education and Lifelong Learning provides consistent, tested, and brief survey questions to measure learning outcomes. Require facilitators to give this survey during the final session of a workshop.

Coordinator

An organization can begin bringing facilitators on only after it has committed to policies and procedures to fully support a volunteer-led peer learning program. As part of that process, a **Coordinator**, the person responsible for recruiting, training, and placing facilitators, will have been selected. (As with everything here, one person may take on multiple roles.)

The steps in this stage are recruiting, selecting facilitators, training, transitioning facilitators to the library, and supporting the facilitators in their role.

Recruiting Volunteers

The importance of recruiting good facilitators cannot be understated: their disposition, aptitude for facilitating, and organizational skills will impact the participants in every program that they facilitate.

Use [this template](#) as a basis for a position description, but be sure to add any additional details needed to fully describe the commitment that you are expecting from candidates.

Here are additional steps and suggestions to take to help you recruit facilitators:

- ❑ Sources for recruiting
 - ❑ Relationship building with patrons in the library - The person most likely to volunteer is the person who is directly asked, so getting comfortable with directly asking patrons with whom you have an established relationship/rapport is an invaluable first step.
 - ❑ This might be someone you have a direct relationship with, or someone that your colleagues know.
 - ❑ Friends group members - and their networks
 - ❑ Don't be afraid to have conversations with patrons who you see frequently but don't know very well
 - ❑ Local colleges and universities students
 - ❑ Larger institutions will have a volunteer/service learning/experiential learning department on campus. Smaller institutions will at least have student groups focused on service and you can contact someone in Student Life to get more info
 - ❑ Could be volunteer or even internship opportunity

- ❑ Local community groups (i.e. Rotary Club)
- ❑ Online recruitment
 - ❑ VolunteerMatch.org - this is good even in less densely populated areas because listings are by zipcode, you might be surprised who you reach and who is willing to travel to get to your location
 - ❑ Your local volunteer clearinghouse (ie. Pittsburgh Cares). If you don't know what this is for your area - check HandsOnNetwork
 - ❑ Utilizing your library's social media and e-marketing (newsletter) network
- ❑ Partner organizations
 - ❑ Do your partner organizations have contacts you can reach out to, either personally or via their social media/e-newsletters
 - ❑ Some service provision orgs are looking for volunteer / work experience opportunities for their clients, could possibly be a good fit
- ❑ Check to see if your city has a volunteer administrator's group - they might have some tips.
- ❑ General Tips:
 - ❑ Know what you are looking for ahead of time - know how you will respond when you have an interested person
 - ❑ Write a volunteer position description, know who they will report to, know your library's clearance policies, etc.
 - ❑ Write a good description for websites like VolunteerMatch and any other e-marketing - clear responsibilities, clear value for what the position brings to the organization, snappy name. Use pictures if you can.
 - ❑ VolunteerMatch.org has a good free webinar on writing a volunteer advertisement

Interviewing and Screening

Interviewing and screening volunteers is less of an intensive interview and more of an opportunity to find if someone is a good fit and able to make the commitment you need them to make. The volunteer recruitment process is a funnel, so you will probably lose some people at this stage, but that's ok, because what you're looking for is someone who is able to make the commitment you need.

Here are some tips to help you prepare to screen prospective volunteer facilitators.

- ❑ Think about who will make a good facilitator, and work back from there to figure out your questions. For Learning Circles, subject-area expertise is less important than:
 - ❑ Being friendly and organized
 - ❑ Showing up on time and consistently
 - ❑ Being a curious life-long learning type

- ❑ Having basic tech skills to navigate P2PU site and course materials
- ❑ By the time you have people in the screening process, you should already know what your next steps are - so have all this prepped ahead of time so that you and the volunteer can agree on this.
 - ❑ What is the training process?
 - ❑ What is their volunteer schedule and what is the commitment you are asking them to make?

Training

Facilitator training is covered in depth at [\[link to training guide\]](#). Based on your library's practices for onboarding new volunteers, additional training may be required.

Below are some suggested best practices for helping a new facilitator feel comfortable in the library.

- ❑ Review Volunteer Position Description. [\[Link to sample\]](#)
 - ❑ Talk about the general responsibilities
 - ❑ Regular and reliable attendance according to agreed upon schedule
 - ❑ Maintain communication with volunteer supervisor
 - ❑ Log volunteer hours in the library's volunteer system (if applicable).
 - ❑ Discuss the specific responsibilities of their position, including training, time commitment, and schedule.
- ❑ Discuss parking and transit options.
- ❑ Introduce volunteers to staff and other volunteers.
 - ❑ Consider re-introducing the first few times that a new volunteer comes in
- ❑ Explain who the volunteer should contact if they have questions.
- ❑ Explain who the volunteer should contact if they need to call off, have an emergency, or in case of bad weather.
- ❑ Open up your orientation to questions. Ask the volunteer what other information they need to get started.

Transitioning Volunteers to their Home Library

If the person who is onboarding the volunteers is not the person who will be directly working with the volunteers at the library, just make sure that everyone on your team is clear about their roles, responsibility and communication

Below are some tips to help you pass trained facilitators to staff who will be working with them directly:

- ❑ It can be really confusing for volunteers to have multiple different people communicating with them and telling them what to do, so libraries should establish their plan for internal and external communication before getting volunteers involved so it's clear who will be making which decisions, and who will be communicating with volunteers
- ❑ Schedule time for the host location to meet with the volunteer to cover some basics:
 - ❑ If the volunteer is not familiar with your department or location, show them around. Be sure to note non-public areas where they are allowed to have access.
 - ❑ Explain where the volunteer can get supplies they need for their project or program.

Supervising volunteers

If the person who recruits and trains volunteers is not the person who will be working directly with facilitators, volunteer supervision may likely be a shared responsibility. If that is the case review this section (which also appears Organizer section) with the people who will be working with the volunteers on a day-to-day basis and decide who will have which responsibilities.

General Tips:

- ❑ Be prepared – Know what tasks you need help with, and be prepared with needed supplies and/or instructions. This document provides a general overview of what it takes to be prepared.
- ❑ Avoid using acronyms or library jargon. Even simple terms, like “program” might not mean anything to a non-library staffer, until they are explained.
- ❑ Be clear with directions and contact information. It's great to provide addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and/or parking information to new volunteers.
- ❑ Thank your volunteers, but don't apologize for giving them work. Volunteers are supporting the library because they've chosen to; respect their contribution by thanking them appropriately.
- ❑ Leave volunteers out of debates about internal processes – If there is a question about roles or responsibilities related to a program or other internal processes, contact the appropriate staff directly to discuss.
- ❑ Communicate with your Location or Department. Even if the library has one point-person in charge of volunteers, making things run smoothly is everyone's job.
- ❑ Build community – Think of volunteers as “super users” of the library. Get to know their names, help them feel welcome, share information, and ask for feedback. Happy library volunteers turn into library advocates!
- ❑ Be friendly, be engaged, and be clear about where volunteers can get help and resources they need to run their LCs.
- ❑ Build volunteer recognition in to what you do, even if you are a small library, you can still recognize and thank volunteers even in small ways - it does not have to be a big, formal program with a huge budget (i.e. recognizing them in your newsletter, being sure to say

thank you, sharing an occasional treat, and communicating with them about the program and the impact it is having.)

- ❑ Having a volunteer position description is a great tool for being able to have difficult conversations with a volunteer if the need arises. Refer back to that document when addressing concerns re: roles/responsibilities, schedule, etc.
- ❑ Most of the time everything will go great, but if it doesn't - it **IS** ok to let a volunteer go. If this happens, you need to be clear and direct in your communication with them.

Host

This is where the impact of social learning is really felt by the community. With the full support of the organization, and the expertise of a set of trained facilitators, the first social learning programs can be offered.

This step of the guide begins with onboarding resources for anyone who has been identified as a **Host**, so anyone who will be working directly with the public and the facilitators. This onboarding section includes how to supervise volunteers and how to use the P2PU platform, and general roles and responsibilities, and how to get into the habit of continuously asking the community what they want to learn.

Roles and Responsibilities

As the local host of adult learning programs, you may or may not have been involved in the planning stages leading up to having the programs in the library. If you have been tasked with being a point person for the volunteer facilitators who will run the programs, below is a brief overview of what you should be prepared to do.

- ❑ Assess need and support the development of new programs in local neighborhood by:
 - ❑ Soliciting/accepting ideas on Learning Circles topics from patrons
 - ❑ Assists with volunteer facilitator recruitment from local patron and partner base
- ❑ Assist Volunteer Facilitator in identifying curriculum resources.
- ❑ Work with volunteers to set and communicate learning circle schedule.
- ❑ Advertise Learning Circle offerings by word of mouth to local patrons.
- ❑ Manage volunteers and Learning Circles participants on a local level, including providing orientation to the space, branch staff, available resources, and volunteer timeclock.
- ❑ Regularly and actively interact and build relationships with patrons and volunteers involved with this program.
- ❑ Connect patrons and volunteers to other library resources as needed.

Using the P2PU Platform

Understand how Peer Learning Facilitators get their course set up in P2PU platform. This is especially useful for learning circles.

You can certainly run adult learning programs without using the P2PU platform; however, there are advantages to using the platform that make it worth the learning curve. Benefits of using this tool include:

- Reminders for participants.
- Promotion of the program on the P2PU website.
- Evaluation tools to help facilitators to understand how their group is progressing in their learning.
- Community resources to share ideas and knowledge with a global community.

As the point person for the facilitators that work in your library, you should be able to:

- Help people set up accounts
- Find and register for learning circles

The most direct and best way to learn to do these things is to do them yourself. Go to <https://learningcircles.p2pu.org/en/accounts/register/> to register an account and familiarize yourself with the site.

Supervising Peer Learning Facilitators

If the person who recruits and trains volunteers is not the person who will be working directly with facilitators, volunteer supervision may likely be a shared responsibility. If that is the case, review this section (which also appears in the Organizer section) with the people who will be working with the volunteers on a day-to-day basis and decide who will have which responsibilities.

General Tips:

- Be prepared – Know what tasks you need help with, and be prepared with needed supplies and/or instructions. This document provides a general overview of what it takes to be prepared.
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- ❑ Most of the time everything will go great, but if it doesn’t - it *IS* ok to let a volunteer go. If this happens, you need to be clear and direct in your communication with them.

Community Engagement and Input

By the time you are getting ready to schedule adult learning programs with trained volunteers, your team’s Organizer will have done a needs assessment on the need for the need for adult learning programs in your community as a whole. However, community input is an ongoing process -- the first step of any new program will be to ask your community what they want to learn about.

A key role that local Hosts can play in supporting adult learning is to create opportunities for the community to give input on the topics that they want to learn more about.

- ❑ The preferred method of getting informal input for these programs is with a simple technique known a [feedback or talkback board \(or Q Method in the learning circles community\)](#). Facilitators are trained in this and will work with you to start doing this.
 - ❑ Identify a bulletin board, whiteboard, or other display area where you will be able to set up a feedback board.
- ❑ Discuss this with colleagues, and answer it yourself: what have people have told us that they want to learn about?
 - ❑ Pass this information along to the facilitator(s).
- ❑ Ask the community what they want to learn about on a regular basis. Consider using

- Talk to partner organizations about the learning needs that their clients face.
- Ask an open-ended question on Twitter or Facebook.
- Include a survey in an electronic newsletter.
- Casually discuss ideas with library patrons during regular interactions.
- Consider other data sources.
 - What does your collection tell you? What nonfiction is in-demand?
 - Do you get reference questions on a particular topic?
 - What important discussions are happening in your community?

Get into the habit of regularly asking these questions, then sharing that information with learning facilitators, colleagues, and other stakeholders.