## We Learn.

# STAFF GUIDE

We help. We guide. **We Learn.**

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# Welcome

What do adults in your community need to learn, and how can the library help them? I can imagine that your answers to these questions are probably similar to ours here at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh: there are as many unique learning goals as there are people in the community, and the library can do so much to help people realize those goals. Our collections go a long way in supporting self-directed learners, and our high-quality information service and programming can sustain a motivated learner through the difficult task of identifying and pursuing learning interests.

But there are barriers to learning that we cannot always adequately address with our traditional methods. Collections can be difficult to navigate and may have gaps that reflect the biases of our institutions; learning from collections alone is also a daunting task for anyone. Programming and information service can make learning more accessible, but there are limits there as well, based on staff time and expertise and availability funding to bring in outside presenters. And, as with collections, programming choices will always reflect the blind spots and biases of our institutions, and will inevitably exclude many in our communities.

Our colleagues at Peer 2 Peer University have long advocated for a simple approach to bridging opportunity gaps in learning. Free, high quality courses and other resources are widely available on the internet. In any community, there are likely to be at least a few people who are interested in learning the same thing. If, rather than taking courses individually, people get together and take courses as a group, a few important things can happen: learning might be deepened through discussion; people may feel more motivated to work through difficult material as a part of group; and like-minded people might develop relationships based on learning that translate to action in the community.

P2PU has put this concept of social learning into practice by developing learning circles. Beginning with a 2015 project with Chicago Public Library, P2PU has offered tools, training, and support that has enabled libraries around the world to offer learning circles. Learning circles have increasingly been adopted by public libraries across the U.S., along with other types of less formal learning like facilitated community conversations, discussions groups, and self-directed programming.

There is an opportunity to take another step in making social learning more accessible to our communities. As libraries have developed learning circles and other approaches to social learning, most have relied on staff to facilitate the learning sessions and, in many cases, choose the topics of learning. This approach will face the same limitations we see with other programming – not nearly enough capacity to meet need, and topics that reflect the institution's priorities rather than those of the community.

The guide that follows offers a path to community-led learning. Library staff still play a key role in organizing, training, and support facilitators, but by turning over leadership of the learning groups to community members, we have the opportunity to help community members be the creators of their own learning experience. We believe that this will improve learning outcomes, give people a better experience, and increase access to opportunities to learn.

# How to use this guide

Are you sold on the idea of having volunteers facilitate learning circles or other types of social learning in your library?

If you answered yes, this guide will take you through just about everything you need to think about and do to get started. If you answered maybe, use this as a checklist to help you decide. (And if you answered no, thanks for reading this far!)

This guide was developed by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh with input from Multnomah County Library and Onondaga Free Library. We aimed to make the information in this guide as universally-applicable as possible – our goal was to create a resource that is useful for any public library. However, there is no doubt that the information here represents our perspective, and that not all of it will apply to every library.

One way that we have tried to make this guide usable for any library is by breaking the work up into modules that can be assigned to the appropriate people at any organization. The work outlined in this guide may be done by one person or may be a team effort – it all depends on how your library works. We have identified three key roles that we think are needed to bring this programming to market. Throughout this guide, we will make a note of which role each task falls under. Depending on your library, one person may do all of the roles, or each role may be split up and done by different people. The assignments we made are just suggestions – read the guide and decide for yourself who will do what.

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Here are the roles that we assigned:

- **Tasks related to the Organizer (blue text)** serve to establish, evaluate, and market the volunteer facilitated learning program. At CLP, these tasks are done by an Adult Programming Coordinator.

- **Task related to the Coordinator (green text)** are about finding and supporting volunteer facilitators. At CLP, this is done by our Volunteer Services Coordinator.

- **Task related to the Host (red text)** role are the direct service, working with the volunteers and the program participants. At CLP, this would be public service librarians.

This guide is organized as a checklist and are roughly in start-to-finish order, although some tasks overlap. We recommend that you review the entire checklist, take what you need from it, and adapt it to your own planning processes.

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*Good luck in launching your adult learning initiative. If you have any questions or suggestions for this guide, you can reach us using the Contact form on the We Learn website.*

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**Roles Key**  Blue text = Organizer   Green text = Coordinator   Red text = Host

# Step 1: 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.

## Get **staff** input about adult learning needs

- Start by talking to your colleagues – what do we know about adult learning needs in our community?
  - What data does your organization collect that could help you understand adult learning needs?
  - What do staff hear from community members? What gaps een identified that could be met by volunteer-led learning?

## Get **community** input about 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.

  *Sample open-ended questions:*
    - What would you like to learn?
    - What are you working on?
    - What would you like to discuss with your neighbors?
    - What technology/language/creative skills would you like to learn this year?

  *Sample closed-ended questions:*
    - Are you interested in joining a group to learn something new?
    - Do you enjoy learning new topics with the support of other learners

## Get **partner** input about learning needs

- 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. Make a list of organizations and get their input. Make sure you talk to:
  - Adult Literacy organizations
  - Educational institutions
  - Workforce organizations
  - Community-based organizations

**Complete this step:**
Gather all of this input in one place so that you can gather and use it as you build support for this new service.

***Next up:*** Taking stock of your library's ability to support a volunteer-led learning program.

# Step 2: Take Stock

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 the capacity to maintain a program of volunteer-led adult learning. Is it a priority? Will it be supported by the entire organization?

## Find the **mission** connection

- How is adult learning reflected in your library's strategic goals and objectives?
    - If your library has a strategic plan, identify ways that volunteer-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?*

## Take stock of **organization capacity**

- 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 volunteer facilitators?
    - Working with community members as facilitators 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*

## Begin to form your **team**

- What assets do you have to make volunteer-led programming successful at your library?
    - Identify your team. In this guide, we recommend thinking about the roles of an Organizer, Coordinator, and Host. However you break up (or don't break up) the project, make sure that everyone understands their commitment.
        - *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.*
    - Are colleaegues at your organization capable of recruiting and sustaining a relationship with a new group of volunteer facilitators?  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?*

## Take an **honest assessment** of your library's ability to succeed at volunteer-led adult learning.

- Approach this however you would any big decision that your library would make before committing to a project. This can be self-assessment, a meeting with your project team, or a discussion with leadership at your library.
- Use the following questions to guide this assessment:
    - Do you have staff buy-in for a volunteer-led adult learning program?
    - Is your library ready to teach community members a different way of learning?
    - Are your community members ready to learn?
    - 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?
    - Do you have access to websites, blog , social media, or other media channels to share marketing content?

**Complete this step:**

Take the information you gathered in this section to build support for volunteer-led adult learning at your library. Depending on your organization's processing, this may culminate in a proposal, or a meeting with decisionmakers, or a conversation with your team. Whatever that looks like for you, when you have the necessary approvals from organizational leadership, you will be ready to gather your team (or schedule time with yourself if you are a team of one) to get the project started.

***Next up:*** Putting all of that preparation to work and getting started with your volunteer-led adult learning program.

# Step 3: 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. This step includes the big milestone of beginning to work with volunteers.

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 start date** for your first public program.
This should be 3-6 months from the project kick-off.

**Three months** from start:
- Recruit facilitators (see page 11)
- Begin marketing
    - See **http://welearnpgh.p2pu.org** for an example of how one library promotes a volunteer-run adult learning program.
    - Go to page 18 for information on using P2PU's resources to organize and promote your program.
    - Follow your library's procedures or best practices for marketing programs.

**Six weeks** from start:
- Train facilitators (see page 14)
- Begin community engagement to recruit learners and determine topics on interest (see page 17)

**Beginning a month** from the start:
- Transition volunteers to the library where they will do their programming (see page 14)
    - *Help staff at that location to meet and get to know the facilitators*
- Recruit participants (see page 17)

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**Complete this step:**

The following steps go into more detail about the tasks laid out in the sequence above. As you work through facilitator recruitment and training, keep an eye on your timeline to make sure you are on track. After this step is completed – you are running your program!

***Next up:*** Recruiting volunteers to serve as facilitators.

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# Step 4: Bringing on Volunteer Facilitators

## 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.

Here are some general tips to help you get started in your recruitment:

### **Create a volunteer position description** and posting.

- Use the template at the end of this guide as a basis for a position description, making sure to add any additional details needed to fully describe the commitment that you are expecting from candidates. 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 all of your library's policies about volunteers such as clearances, length of commitment, and availability.
    - 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*

### **Recruit volunteers** using internal and external channels.
*Here are some recommended places to look for good candidates to be facilitators:*

- **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 college and university 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)**
  - Specialized interest groups and clubs often have existing community networks and focused skillsets that may help you run effective (and well-attended) programs on specific topics

- **Online recruitment**
  - VolunteerMatch.org - this is good even in less-densely-populated areas because listings are posted by zip code. You might be surprised who you can 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.org.
  - 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.

## 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: what you're looking for is someone who is able to make the commitment you need.

## **Screen** facilitator candidates

- Think about who will make a good facilitator, and work back from there to figure out your questions. For nonformal adult learning, 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?

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**Complete this step:**

The results of this step should be a roster (of any number) of community members who are interested in being a leader in your community's learning environment, and who have an aptitude for facilitating learning in a less-than-formal environment.

***Next up:*** Recruiting volunteers to serve as facilitators.

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# Step 5: Support Facilitators to Sustain Programming

## Training

Facilitator training is covered in depth in our online course Peer Learning Facilitator Training. Based on your library's practices for onboarding new volunteers, additional training may be required.

Beyond the facilitator training, we recommend taking some additional steps to orient your facilitators to the library:

### Review Volunteer Position Description
- 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 logistical concerns
- 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.

### Transition Volunteers to their Home Base
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 people communicating with them and telling them what to do. 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.
  – Show the volunteer the spaces that they have available to use for programming.

## Supervising volunteers

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

**Establish a shared responsibility** for supervising volunteers. This is a shared responsibility among all library staff who will interact with volunteers.

Here are some tips to creating a productive and positive environment for your volunteer facilitators.

- 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 prepared – Know what tasks you need help with and be prepared with needed supplies and/or instructions.
- 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 and avoid apologizing 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.
- Be friendly, be engaged, and be clear about where volunteers can get help and resources they need to run their learning circles.
- 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.

**Complete this step:**

Once you have recruited, trained, and onboarded your volunteers, you have everything that you need to begin offering your first learning workshops to the public.

***Next up:*** Begin your programs.

# Step 6: Beginning Programming

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. Your preparation will pay off in smooth implementation of the volunteer-facilitated adult learning model of programming.

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.

Note that this guide will not cover the specifics of running the programs themselves. That topic is covered in depth in the Facilitator Training course, which is available at **https://welearnpgh.p2pu.org/facilitate**.

## 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 learning interests in the community
- 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

### Support volunteer facilitators working in your library.
- Help the facilitator identify curriculum resources and supplementary resources for courses they are leading in your space.
- Work with facilitator to set the learning circle schedule, reserve space, and communicate with participants.
- 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 time clock.
- 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.

**Learn to use the P2PU platform** so that you can help the facilitator and learners with it.

The P2PU platform is an extremely useful platform for hosting, managing, promoting, and sharing 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:*
- Automatic reminders for participants
- Promotion of the program on the P2PU website
- Evaluation surveys to help facilitators gauge their learners' success in the program
- Public events and 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 facilitators set up accounts
- Support facilitators in creating and managing their learning circles in the system
- Help patrons 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.

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**Complete this step:**
If the volunteer-facilitated model of adult learning is successful at your library,

*Next up:* Begin your programs.

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# Step 7: Evaluate Your Program So That it Can Evolve

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 helping facilitators to adjust within a learning session. Individual program evaluation data, combined with data from other learning programs, helps you understand how the program as a whole is (or is not) serving organizational goals.

Evaluation is covered in some detail in the Facilitator Training course, and below are our suggestions of things to help you sustain your adult learning program.

## **Develop** an evaluation plan

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

## **Remind** facilitators to collect feedback and use from users during each session.

- Encourage facilitators to set aside time at the end of learning sessions to use the Plus/Delta technique to allow people to give feedback along the way.

## **Use built-in P2PU evaluation tools** and Project Outcome to measure outcomes for learners.

- Facilitators should also be encouraged to use the weekly meeting evaluation form that is included in the P2PU platform. This provides a central gathering place for session-by-session feedback that is shared with the entire group.
- The Project Outcomes Education and Lifelong Learning toolkit provides consistent, tested, and brief survey questions to measure learning outcomes. This resource is offered by the Public Library Association at no cost to participating libraries. Require facilitators to give this survey during the final session of a workshop. Visit **www.projectoutcome.org** to register a free account and begin using the survey portal.

# Appendix: **Sample** Volunteer Position Description

**General Volunteer Responsibilities:**
- Regular and reliable attendance according to agreed upon schedule
- Maintain communication with volunteer supervisor
- Log volunteer hours in the Library's volunteer system.
- Wear a Volunteer ID Badge while volunteering

**Responsibilities of this Position:**
- Participates in Facilitator Learning Circle (Volunteer Training) prior to volunteering at branch
- Facilitate learning groups based on community-identified learning topics
  - Works with library staff to identify curriculum and set learning group schedule
  - Attends weekly, sets up room, facilitates learning based on set curriculum, communicates with library staff about supply needs
  - Conducts outcome assessment at the end of each learning group
- Commits to 1 year as a learning group facilitator, facilitating at least four Learning groups during that time

**Time Commitment:**
- Volunteers will commit to serving in this position for a minimum of 1 year
- Volunteers should expect to commit to volunteering 5-10 hours per month
- Volunteers will work with library staff to establish exact schedule for learning groups (including specific dates and times)

**Agreement:**

☐ **Optional:** I give my permission to use my photographic image for publicity, educational and other library-related purposes. This release includes still and moving likenesses and may be used in print or electronic publications.

☐ I understand that this volunteer agreement is not an offer of paid employment with Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP). I agree that my relationship as a volunteer with CLP may end at any time at my discretion or at the discretion of CLP staff.

☐ I understand that if I request a volunteer position that involves working with children, I will be responsible for obtaining and/or providing proof of my Child Abuse and Criminal Record Check clearances.

☐ In performing my volunteer duties with CLP, I agree to treat as confidential all information about library business operations, patrons, products, plans, processes, or other data.

Volunteer Name (Print):_____

Volunteer Name (Sign): _____

Date:_____

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