

Speaker Finders Workshop: Friday 27 February 2015 at Burnt Stump Inn

Introduction

In the introductory session, Michaela outlined a few essential points:

- The purpose of the Workshop was to exchange information, get clarification where necessary and to share ideas.
- Remember that U3A members cannot be paid for speaking to other U3As. Worth asking possible speakers if they are a member of another U3A, but remember that reasonable expenses can be paid. Be firm about this as it is against the ethos of the U3A to make payment to a U3A member.
- If a speaker asks for a donation to a charity, the cheque should be made out to the charity and the treasurer should mark the account entry 'in lieu of a fee'.
- Advice from National Office warns against the use of solicitors and accountants as speakers as this can lead to problems for members if the speaker offers to give personal advice. See final section WARNING.

Topic 1 Speaker contact

How is initial contact generally made? How is this followed up?

Sometimes need to explain what U3A is. Initial contact usually by email or telephone

Some U3As have been contacted by potential speakers, or names passed on by other U3As

Websites are useful for finding names. Some speakers have website or are on Utube.

Only use speakers who have email/answerphone/voicemail.

All U3As in the group contacted the speaker by telephone before the date.

Make sure the Speaker has a map, post code and notice of any directions that would be helpful to locate the venue

Are any records kept of communications?

Printed Emails are used as a record of contacts

Telephone contacts to be noted. Not all U3As were doing this.

Keep a file in case someone else has to take over the role.

Ask and record on the file what equipment is required, eg screen or microphone.

Ask speaker to bring invoice/letter asking for the fee.

Keep records of speakers, possibly including judgement on quality of speaker?

A pro forma letter to be returned by the speaker as this establishes a legal contract

Is there a formal booking form? What is recorded on it?

Not all U3As have a formal booking form as details were confirmed in letters/emails; others had a formal form with a copy to be signed by the speaker and returned

Use of a standard letter setting out details discussed in telephone conversations / emails.

Speaker booking form covering all information including screen, microphone, etc.

Booking form to include all financial details.

Contact with the speaker nearer the date?

If the speakers are booked a long time in advance, make contact with them in the interim period.

Contact with the speaker a week before the meeting.

Contact before the meeting varies from two weeks to a few days by telephone and/or email.

Do you accept the price given or do you negotiate?

Depends on the size of the U3A as to whether price is negotiated. Set a maximum price.

Some speakers ask the size of the group and will often want to adjust their price upwards!

Usually accept fees asked for.

It is sometimes possible to negotiate the fee but this depends on the speaker's budget. Check must be made whether this includes expenses or, if expenses are extra, how much they are likely to be.

20p-25p for mileage? Could use AA Route Finder to establish mileage. Some speakers will negotiate. If the fee is very high and the speaker will not negotiate, do not book the speaker. Do not book if too expensive.

Caution - expenses may be a big cost.

Be professional when discussing fees. Most speakers are professionals.

General comments

Some speakers ask the size of the group and will often want to adjust their price upwards!

Some U3As book their speakers up to a year in advance so this will help someone new to the role.

Use of local speakers during winter months to avoid risk of travel disruption.

Ensure the person responsible for the equipment is aware of requirements.

The Sherwood speaker seeker is not a committee member. After discussions with Michaela it was noted that it could help her in her role if she were a committee member as finance is involved for which only committee members are accountable. Remember that the committee has been elected to manage the U3A so including the Speaker Seeker as a Committee role will ensure the Speaker Seeker is familiar with what's happening in the U3A generally.

Topic 2 Speaker budget

Do you have a Budget?

There was a range of budget provision, from Annual Budgets to Budget per Speaker. Discussions showed that people felt the provision of an annual budget was helpful as it gave flexibility to the Speaker Seeker to balance expensive speakers against cheaper ones and keep within Budget.

There was quite a difference in the range of budgets which generally reflected the size of the U3A and their income, as well as the number of speakers required in a year which varied from 6 to 10 depending on the structure and timing of monthly meetings.

How is it agreed?

Agreement was usually a Committee decision but not all Speaker Seekers were Committee members. Since there was money involved, it was suggested that there should be guidelines for Speaker Seekers drawn up by the Committee. Some Speaker Seekers were given freedom to spend up to a certain amount per speaker after which Committee approval had to be obtained.

It was felt that the budget should be spent otherwise it had been set too high. People need to remember the Charity Commission regulations about the amount of money they should hold in their accounts. The absolute maximum is 6 months.

Although speakers should be good, Speaker Seekers shouldn't feel guilty if one turns out not to be.

Is booking good speaker important?

General agreement that it was important to have a good speaker and that the budget could be broken if the speaker were thought to be good enough.

Would you break the budget for a very good speaker? If so, how would you go about it?

There was a range of answers to this question, a lot depended on the budget and how it was managed by the committee.

Topic 3 Speaker Suggestions.

How reliable are recommendations?

This is subjective. Ideally get 2 opinions. Speak to the proposed speaker and get a 'feel' yourself. Get recommendations from other U3As. Word of mouth recommendations need a 'health warning' as people's ideas of what is good will vary considerably.

What sources are there for locating speakers?

Talk to other Speaker Finders (SF).

Use the various Directories of Speakers i.e. the groups recommended Sue Clayton's Directory (Presently being updated). Search the internet. A recommendation from one SF was Dianne Mannering@ Dianne Mannering.co.uk. Ask SFs from other organisations i.e. Rotary, WI, Probus. A word of caution: some members may have already heard these speakers but if the speaker is good they may like to come and hear that person again and also spread the word. Look at the U3A speaker list.

How do you decide which speaker to select?

The groups thought that it was up to the SF to produce a list of speakers, bearing in mind you can't please all the people all of the time and what suits one will not suit the other. The SF needs to prepare a balanced and varied broad spectrum of speakers (bearing in mind that our groups have male and female members, so try not to provide Speakers for one sex only). Avoid repetition and avoid speakers linked to organisations that may want to use U3A for their commercial purposes i.e. Solicitors and Wills etc.

What role does the Committee play in selecting the Speakers?

Most groups thought it was the SF job to produce a list of speakers for the programme. This can be presented to the Committee so they can approve or not, for discussion if someone has a really valid point.

Topic 4 On the day

Reserve a car park space

What about Mobile numbers

Exchange mobile numbers

What is the Speaker Finders job on the day?

Check the equipment works

Introduce speaker to the technical people

Greet Speaker and take to the hall

Offer tea/coffee/water

Show them the way to the loos

Sign in where required – fire regulations

Remind the Speaker of the time limit

Check how they want to be introduced (beforehand ask for a 'few words' to be used in the introduction).

Should be Speaker be introduced to anyone

Introduce to Chairman

Who normally gives the vote of thanks?

Chair usually gives the vote of thanks

Send a Letter of thanks afterwards

How is the Speaker usually paid

Pay by cheque on the day

Ensure treasurer knows the figure and has prepared cheque

How to get the Speaker out of the hall gracefully

NO ANSWERS TO THIS QUESTION

Is there any post-meeting contact with the Speaker

NO ANSWERS TO THIS QUESTION

Do you have a system of warning if time is running out?

Gently interrupt Speaker.

Do you have a contingency plan for a 'no show' Speaker

Have a quiz ready

Have DVDs ready – and equipment on which to play them

Have a couple of 'stand by' members of the U3A ready to give a presentation at short notice.

Additional issues

Find out if Speaker has items for sale and if so arrange a table if you have agreed to allow them to sell items

Notes of talk for U3A newsletter

One branch (Southwell) takes the speaker out to lunch – Speaker Finder arranges.

Help clear chairs away

WARNING SENT TO ALL BUSINESS SECRETARIES IN NATIONAL OFFICE MAILING MAY 2013

It has come to my attention that commercial companies offering free talks on will writing, financial products and equity release, may be targeting U3As throughout the UK. Following the talk, they offer to provide further free advice on an individual appointment basis which takes place at people's homes and it is then that products are introduced and often sold, which may turn out to be entirely unsuitable.

My advice, for obvious reasons, is do not under any circumstances give such people access to your members, even if a particular speaker/company has been recommended by another U3A. It is often the case that because an individual or a company representative is speaking to their U3A, members think they are being endorsed and are therefore safe.

I know that U3As are generally very circumspect in their choice of speakers but I have recently been made aware of some worrying situations which have occurred following talks of this sort, hence this warning.

Lin Jonas