What are Shared Learning Projects (SLPs)?
A SLP involves a team of U3A members, usually from different U3As, exploring a specific topic, proposed by a U3A or by an institution (such as a museum, art gallery, stately home or library) and normally there is a set time span.

The Shared Learning Projects Start-up Leaflet
This leaflet is intended to give U3As and outside organisations a brief introduction to SLPs and how to set up a project. Copies are available from National Office or from your Regional SLP Contact.

The Purpose of this Advice Sheet
This advice sheet gives detailed instructions on how to set up a project. It concentrates on projects with outside organisations but the information may be adapted for use by those U3As setting up a joint project with other U3As.

If you want to set up a SLP with a museum or other institution, you need to contact the Lifelong Learning Officer or similar person to ask if there is a research or assessment project you could undertake for them. You should tell them about the U3A and your U3A in particular and arrange to visit them to discuss the details. If possible, you should go with the person who will lead the SLP as the relationship between the organisation contact and the U3A leader is crucial to the success of the project. The learning will be 'shared' between all the parties involved. You need to discuss and agree the following points:

1. The length of the project, the number of meetings and the dates.

2. The number of people who will work on the project – usually 10 to 12. You will need a meeting room to accommodate the group.

3. Is the location accessible for your members?

4. Is the organisation prepared to host a final presentation?

5. Will you have access to photocopying facilities/library/computers and tea and coffee?

6. What will be the final outcome, e.g. a report, leaflet, display or web entry?

The Role of the Leader
The leader will be involved from the planning stage of the project to the presentation. The leader will work closely with the organisation and will need practical and 'people' skills so maybe someone who has led an interest group would be a good choice. They should be chosen with care as leading any group can be tricky and leading a SLP group is no exception!

Advertising the Project & Applications
Once the initial contact has been made and a project has been identified, it may take some months to set it up. You must advertise the project to members of the U3As who will be invited to participate. Use all the means at your disposal, i.e. a printed flyer, websites and announcements at monthly meetings. You should allow an application period of six weeks and you might like to prepare an application form for people to complete. If there are more applications than places, you will have to devise some selection criteria appropriate to the project. The leader's choice should be final.

The Meetings

You may choose to have a preliminary 'getting to know you' session before your first meeting. At the first meeting, the leader and the organisation contact will outline the project and the work to be undertaken by the group. Sources of information on the topic to be researched and their location should be discussed. If people are to work in pairs, they should pair up at this meeting. A tour of the institution/site visit should be included in this session.

Regular meetings are an integral part of the shared learning experience and team members should commit to attend all such meetings. Perhaps a guest speaker might be invited to provide useful information at one or two of these meetings.

Working between Meetings

If you are working on a SLP, you must expect to devote a significant amount of time to the project and carrying out research and keeping in touch between meetings is very important.

The Presentation/Open Day/ Exhibition

The final event needs careful planning and should be discussed in good time. You need to think about the length of the presentation and whether it is appropriate to the project. Guests should be invited from U3As and by the organisation. If available, visual aids may be helpful.

Final Outcome

Depending upon the requirements of the organisation, a final document may be produced. This may take the form of a report, a leaflet or a page on the organisation's website. The leader may delegate responsibility for this to a member of the team with particular skills or may take charge themselves. Some examples of outcomes can be found on the SLP pages on the national website – www.u3a.org.uk.

How do I get help?

You can contact your Regional SLP Contact: please call National Office for the name and contact details on: 020 8466 6139 or look at the SLP pages on the national website in the members' area.

Sources: several articles on completed projects are published in each edition. You can find back copies on the national website.

You can also ask to borrow back copies of the reports of past projects from the Resource Centre (tel. 020 8315 0199, email: resource.centre@u3a.org.uk). Or you can visit the national website and go to the SLP pages and the 'Projects to Date' page. There you will find outcomes of projects which have concluded with the research being recorded on a website or a leaflet in the form of a pdf file.

Sources of Funding for Shared Learning Projects

You may like to bear the following advice in mind when thinking about setting up a SLP. Don't be put off for lack of funds. The following paragraphs contain some ideas and advice on sources of funding for small projects.

U3A policy states that you can apply for funding as long as this does not affect the integrity of the U3A. There should be no strings attached to any grants you apply for and no contracts to provide any services

should be entered into. The applications should be for a project's end product, such as a booklet, information for a website, a semi-permanent display or recordings of memories on a CD etc. If you are in any doubt about the acceptability of the funding you are applying for, contact Lin Jonas at National Office.

A good first point of call is your local voluntary sector "umbrella" organisation. These can have a variety of titles, but **Council for Voluntary Service** is a common one. Whether you are looking for funding or not, it is a good idea for every U3A to be listed as a voluntary sector organisation or charity on your local CVS database. You will then receive mail-outs from them letting you know the type of training and funding opportunities they have on offer. Their information will also give you some idea of other organisations you may be able to approach as partners for SLPs in your local community. The CVS can often offer assistance in applying for grants and will know of local funds you may be able to apply for, as well as giving assistance with making applications for Heritage Lottery Funding.

To apply for **Heritage Lottery Funding** look at their website www.hlf.org.uk

If you don't want to go online you can ring the HLF Helpline on 020 7591 6042/6044 and ask them to send you some of their leaflets and ask for the phone number of their contact in your area. These local representatives holding workshops and drop-in sessions at venues across their regions. You will find these representatives very approachable and they will discuss your ideas with you and give you their advice.

Your local area will also most probably have a county wide heritage organisation. They are a good starting point for applications for funding for publications of county wide interest. You will find them keen to help: "please apply; we like to have some other charitable interests other than restoration of church bells" was the comment by one heritage organisation approached by us recently!

There may also be a local **Wildlife Trust** which may be interested in a joint project and resulting publication to sell in shops at their centres.

It is in the interests of these Trusts or other bodies to have their logo and a statement that they have funded the project on your publication as well as the U3A and SLP logos.

If you are interested in funding for a Community Website look at the information on the pages of **The Community Archives and Heritage Group** at www.communityarchives.org.uk under 'Resources' and then under 'Funding Advice'. This is a good website to look at so you can see what archive material and other information is being put on websites and this may give you some ideas to pursue yourselves. Open access to this material then benefits all researchers.

Finally, involve your members: ask for ideas and find out if they know of any sources of funding. You may have a member who has retired from an organisation which is sufficiently interested in local matters to grant you funding. The organisation may also relish the prospect of some publicity for themselves! . You may have members who have applied for funding in the past and know how to write a good application. When considering funding for a SLP, remember to use all means at your disposal!
Jennifer Anning, National SLP Co-ordinator, 29th May 2014