
U3A in Victoria - Regional Structure Position Paper for Discussion and U3A Survey on the Regional Structure August 2020

Introduction

This paper presents a view of the current regional structure of the U3A movement in Victoria. The purpose of the paper is to create a basis for discussion among stakeholders in the regional structure – that is, among Member U3As, regional representatives, the Regions Combined Group and Chair, and U3A Network Victoria.

Member U3As have made suggestions about altering the structure via Network Council and other channels. Those who run and use the regional structure – the regional representatives, the Regions Combined Group, and Network’s strategic and operational participants – have also identified areas where change may increase and broaden the effectiveness of this structure.

In addition, the lockdown, social distancing, and isolation provisions of the COVID-19 pandemic are forcing U3As to look at altering much of their face-to-face operation. Many traditional face-to-face classes and activities are being adapted to take account of the social distancing and video conferencing environment. In 2020 regional meetings and meetings of the Regions Combined Group have been held via video conference. These changes can be an opportunity as well as a curse.

Circulation of this paper and the accompanying survey will provide an opportunity for Member U3As to give their own views and goals for regions. Written feedback is being sought and other channels such as discussion forums may be used if there is interest in this.

Feedback and consultation will be directed through the Combined Regions Group and the regional delegates from each U3A.

With the move to video conferencing for all meetings during the Covid pandemic crisis in Victoria, opportunities exist for increasing group discussion and contact about a regional review. As a result, a vigorous timetable for the review is proposed:

August	Consultation with Combined Regions Chair
September 2	Liaison with Combined Regions Group
September/October	Regional meeting presentation by Regional reps
After each regional mtg	Paper emailed to Secretaries of each U3A
November 30	Feedback due to Combined Regions Chair
February 2021	Preliminary report to Network Committee (tentative)
March 2021	Feedback to Combined Regions Committee
March 2021	Feedback to Members Council (tentative)

Purposes of the Regional Structure

A regional structure was first used for Victorian U3As by the Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board prior to the creation of U3A Network Victoria, in order for ACFE to administer grant applications by individual U3As. The idea of regional groupings was embraced by U3As as a structure for local co-operation and friendship. See Appendix 1 for more details of the regional structure's history and details of its current operating structure.

As the number of U3As in Victoria grew larger, the regional structure was adopted by U3A Network Victoria around 2010 to provide another communication channel between U3As and Network and to strengthen U3As through group activities. The value of regions was further recognised by their inclusion for the first time in the constitution adopted unanimously by Member U3As at the Special General Meeting in September, 2019. Operations of the regional structure are left for working decisions rather than being prescribed in the constitution.

Network Constitution, 2019, notes in Clause 77 the purposes of the regions:

- (1) to facilitate communication among U3As and between U3As and Network;
- (2) to strengthen Member U3As by providing a forum for sharing ideas and opportunities, for mutual examination of common problems, and for joint activity in such areas as marketing and advocacy;
- (3) to support the information flows initiated at Members Council meetings;
- (4) to provide a structure for workshops and other training activities;
- (5) to identify opportunities to share tutor and class resources.

Network Committee has also supported the regional structure by advocating to our funders for financial support for regional meetings and by including such funding in its annual budget.

Regional meetings have a focus of collegial support on issues around membership, classes, marketing, relationships with council and other potential partners, venues, etc., and an education component (perhaps a tutor workshop or a governance component). Regional meetings are also a channel for use by other Network programs like Building Community Engagement and Education Best Practice. The purpose of this review is to help decide how the regional operational structure can increase its effectiveness.

Issues to Consider

A number of issues have been raised or identified.

1. Some U3As consider would like more or other information about surrounding U3As and the whole network of U3As.
2. The current geographic nature of the regional structure is a deterrent for many U3As to travel for face to face meetings and sometimes combines U3As with limited mutual interests.
3. The current regional structure sometimes seem to have unclear goals.

4. Feedback mechanisms between regional meetings and their chief stakeholders – Member U3As and U3A Network – sometimes are not effective. Is the right information being conveyed in each direction? Can it be done differently?
5. Familiarity with online meetings – a necessary skill in the Covid pandemic era – provide new opportunities for structuring regional meetings or special interest meetings. Could online meetings entirely replace face to face regional meetings, with consequent loss of real time networking? How could extra-regional meetings of special interest groups be set up and facilitated?
6. Network Committee is seeking feedback on how U3As are tracking, what training needs they have, what development projects would help U3As, and indicators of success in managing volunteers, delivering popular courses and achieving outcomes for members.
7. Network has identified that the Network management committee makes insufficient use of the information currently collected through the regional reporting system. It also seeks ways to provide greater briefing to regional representatives and to make the role of regional representative more effective. One suggestion is to include regional representatives onto other working groups and sub-committees and to invite regional representatives to attend one or more Network Committee meetings during the year.
8. Regions seem to have little opportunity to contribute to Network development of programs and services or to identify opportunities for growth and new U3As.
9. Training provided as part of regional meetings does not always attract the broader U3A volunteer membership
10. Recent workshops run by Network on topics like Zoom training, privacy and data security, and marketing provide value in addition to, or in lieu of large numbers of regional meetings.

Your Thoughts and Feedback:

U3A Network Victoria and the Combined Regions Group would like to know each U3A's thoughts about regions – about the issues raised here and about any other issues or suggestions that U3As would like to make. A survey has been prepared to give each U3A the opportunity to provide feedback. The survey is online and includes multiple choice questions and opportunities for written opinions.

Where possible please include the stories about what regional meetings have meant for you. These are particularly important for Network to be able to represent the movement to government and other partners.

The Combined Regions Group would also like each U3A regional delegate to take instruction from their Committee of Management and to be prepared to discuss their U3A's ideas at upcoming regional meetings in 2021.

In the survey U3As will be asked:

- What benefits have regional meetings delivered to your U3A?
- What other things should be included in regional meetings?
- Are there parts of the current agenda that could be omitted? Do you see downside or negative value in any aspects of regional meetings?
- Are training and development needs adequately covered in regional meetings?
- What have these meetings meant for you?

While the online survey will be emailed to each U3A in a region after the regional meeting in September and October, a sample of the survey is provided here in Appendix 2.

If your U3A would like to discuss this paper before responding, or if your U3A has some queries before you provide written feedback, please contact Martina Ryan, Member Services Manager on msm@u3avictoria.com.au

Appendix 1 – Development and Operation of the Regional Structure

The Regional Structure was established prior to the establishment of U3A Network Victoria. Individual U3As were funded by ACFE to provide computer classes for their members and were grouped by ACFE Regions aligned with Education Department regions. Regional meetings were called by the ACFE Office at this point.

As the number of funded U3As grew U3A Network was established to liaise with ACFE and other funders on behalf of Member U3As.

A Development and Support Officer (DSO) was employed by U3A Network Victoria in 2008 to support Member U3As and the regional structure. The structure then moved to support U3As in the breadth of the work they do in their own communities not just focused on the delivery of one course type, such as computers.

Current Structure

The current structure and operation of regions is:

All U3As assigned to a region

There are currently five rural regions and six metro regions. See Appendix 2 for a list of the 11 regions and the U3As currently in each region. As the regional structure is used for communication between Network and U3As in each region, Network believes it is important that every U3A be in a region.

Each U3A is asked to appoint a regional delegate to attend regional meetings and liaise between the region and their U3A in both directions. The regional delegate might be the U3A's Council voting delegate or might be a separate person.

Combined Regions Group:

Each region elects or appoints a regional representative to the Combined Regions Group. Until the onset of the COVID pandemic, the Combined Regions Group met four times per calendar year, twice by video conference and twice in person, on or around the dates of the Network Members Council meetings. In addition to the 11 regional representatives, the Network Member Services Manager attends, and more often the Network President and other Network representatives attend.

One of these 11 representatives is elected as the Combined Regions Group Chair. The Chair works closely with the Member Services Manager on the development of the Regions program and on issues that arise between meetings.

The details of the draft roles and practices of this group are found in the Combined Regions Handbook available on the Combined Regions Group Team site and in future the Network website under About Network/Regions tab.

The Network Team site has been set up to house working documents and chat functions for the regional representative.

Agreed Meeting Plan:

Until 2019 each region met from one to four times per year. The third meeting, in those regions that run a third, is used for a development day for committee or tutors. Twenty two meetings plus four with an education focus is 26 meetings.

Network handles the logistics of arranging regional meetings in liaison with the Host U3A and the Regional Rep. During the September / October round of Regional meetings each year, the following year's calendar and program are agreed to.

The agreed plan for 2020 was for one meeting to have an element of broad reporting for which a proforma has been developed and trialed, and the other an education component for U3A committees. Workshop topics have included governance, action planning and Dealing With Challenging Situations.

This plan has been altered due to COVID-19 health limitations, and where possible video conference (Zoom) meetings have been held.

Reporting to and from U3A Network Committee

The Member Services Manager (MSM) provides a report to every Regional meeting covering Network goals, products and services, as well as progress on Network projects. The MSM also provides a written report to the U3A Network Victoria Committee after each regional meeting round. This provides a summary of successes, issues and queries from each U3A.

The MSM also represents the interests of regions and their Member U3As on U3A Network Victoria committees. All reports become a record as part of the Network Committee Minutes.

Flexibility:

Since 2017 two regions have merged - South Gippsland and Gippsland became Gippsland - and two U3As moved to a region they felt more appropriate to their needs and / or closer to their location.

Four U3As have had limited participation in regional activities. Feedback from three U3As is that the region does not meet their needs - two of the three attend meetings - and one U3A is supportive but does not have a representative to attend.

There has also been interest shown in the establishment of special interest groups based on size or interests or needs, providing another dimension of regional activity.

In one region the members - three larger U3As and four smaller U3As - meet separately as well as formally in the larger group, to the published schedule, on a needs basis, to consult on issues of concern.



U3A Network Survey about Regional Structure in Victoria V4

Welcome to My Survey

Welcome to the U3A Network Victoria Regions Survey.

Thank you for participating in our survey, your feedback is important.

The purpose of this survey is to give all U3As an opportunity to talk about what they want from the regional structure and how they can best use regions to gain information and to give information to other U3As and to Network. Please talk survey questions over with your U3A's committee of management before completing the survey.

Questions in each section must be completed before advancing to the next section.

An asterisk beside a question means that an answer is mandatory.

You can exit the survey at the end of a section and return later via your email invitation to continue with your answers.

U3A Network Survey about Regional Structure in Victoria V4

U3A Details

This section has details about your U3A

* 1. U3A Name

* 2. Contact Details

Contact Name

Email Address

Phone Number

3. Date

Please enter today's date

Date

U3A Network Survey about Regional Structure in Victoria V4

Section 1

* 4. Value in regional meetings?

Some of the benefits and goals of regional meetings are listed below. Please indicate the importance your U3A sees in these benefits by ranking 1,2,3 and so on. You must rank all 8 benefits, or else our system will fill in the empty rankings in the remaining ascending order.



Receive Information from other U3As in the region



Provide information to other U3As in the region



Receive information from U3A Network Victoria



Provide information to U3A Network Victoria



Identify contacts in other U3As in the region ____



Discuss problems and seek solutions from other U3As



Agree co-ordinated action with other U3As in the region, for example, marketing campaigns, membership fees, contacts with local government or community



Make friends in other U3As in the region

5. Are there any other benefits you want to note from your U3A's participation in regional meetings? If so, please provide information in the box below

* 6. – Regional meetings are usually structured with the following agenda items.

Please indicate the importance your U3A sees in these benefits by ranking 1, 2, 3 and so on. You must rank all 5 benefits, or else our system will fill in the empty rankings in the remaining ascending order.



Reports from delegates about their U3A's activities and plans



Report from Network representative



Consideration of special topics – eg, report on a special topic like Network Education Program or technology plans



Special speaker OR

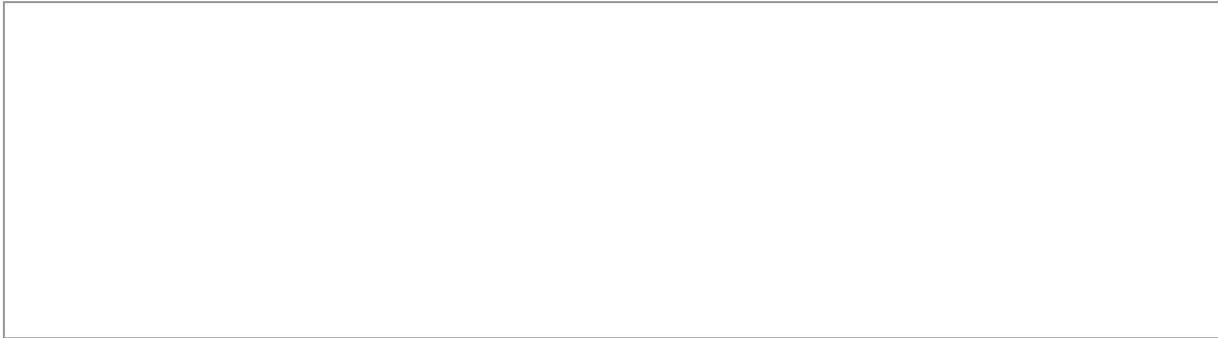


Training session

7. Are there any additional sections or ideas that you would like included in regional meetings? If so, please list your ideas.

* 8. In the last two years regional meetings and workshops have included training and development ideas such as Governance (eg strategic planning), Marketing, Tutor workshops, member management systems etc.

What training and development needs would you like covered in regional meetings?



U3A Network Survey about Regional Structure in Victoria V4

Section 2

* 9. Is there anything you would omit from regional meetings?

* 10. Assuming at least one video-conference meeting a year after return of full face-to-face activities (that is, after social distancing provisions are lifted), is the frequency of regional meetings appropriate (currently 2-3 meetings per year)?

Yes

No

If no, please give your thoughts on appropriate frequency.

* 11. – Currently the basic structure of regions is geographic, radiating from the centre of Melbourne out towards the metropolitan boundaries or from the edge of the metro area out toward state borders. Do you think a different structure would be of greater benefit to your U3A?

No need to change – I am happy with current structure

Yes I would like to use a different structure

Please explain your thoughts on different structures such as community of interest, geographically similar (say, for example, outer western along the state border with South Australia), size, or other grouping.

* 12. Each region selects a representative to meet quarterly with other regional representatives and Network. In the last year, the 11 regional representatives have developed a Regional Round Up form, asking each U3A delegate to fill in a brief report on the status of their U3A. Does your U3A support the idea of a brief written report once or twice a year?

Yes

No

Please can you explain why. Can you suggest another method by which your regional delegate can provide information about your U3A to your Regional colleagues?

U3A Network Survey about Regional Structure in Victoria V4

Final Page

13. Conclusion

Thank you for taking this survey and providing information and data to assist your delegates and regional representatives in building stronger and more effective U3As.

If your U3A has any other questions about this survey or about the regional program, you can contact the Member Services Manager at Network, Martina Ryan via msm@u3avictoria.com.au or your regional representative.

Martina Ryan
Member Services Manager,
U3A Network Victoria
msm@u3avictoria.com.au

If you have finished the survey, please click Done.

Click on Prev to review previous answers.

Close the survey window to finish later.

When you have completed the survey and pressed DONE, you will not be able to return to change any answers.

Appendix 3 – Current Members of the Regions Combined Group

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES X REGIONS	
Chair of Combined Regions Group: Vacant	
RURAL REGIONS	METROPOLITAN REGIONS
Region 1 South West Victoria DI CRAY (Cori Bay) di_cray@bigpond.com	Region 6 Western PETER BAINBRIDGE (Altona) peterjudeb@yahoo.com.au
Region 2 Grampians LEE ALBERT (Ballarat) leealb205@gmail.com	Region 7 Northern Metro Vacant
Region 3 Loddon-Mallee IAN BURDETT (Bendigo) treborian@gmail.com	Region 8 Outer Eastern Metro Ray Pleming (Yarra Ranges) president@u3ayarraranges.com.au
Region 4 North East Victoria GREG BARNES (Goulburn Valley) dngbarnes@hotmail.com	Region 9 Eastern Valerie Donlon (Nunawading) valerie.donlon@bigpond.com
Region 5 Gippsland JUDY MANN (Bairnsdale) judithmann@bigpond.com	Region 10 Outer South East & Mornington Pen. IAN PAYNE (Frankston) paynei@outlook.com
	Region 11 Central & Southern Metro TONY APLIN (Bayside) tonyaplin@hotmail.com

Appendix 4 - List of Regions and U3As in Each Region

RURAL REGIONS (54)	
Region 1 South West Victoria (10)	Region 2 Grampians (9)
U3A Apollo Bay U3A Colac Otway U3A Corangamite U3A Corio Bay (Northern Geelong) U3A Geelong U3A Hamilton U3A Port Fairy U3A Portland District U3A Surfcoast (Torquay, Anglesea, Winchelsea) U3A Warrnambool	U3A Ararat & District U3A Avoca U3A Ballarat U3A Creswick & District U3A Dunmunkle (Minyip, Murtoa, Rupanyup) U3A Hepburn Shire (Daylesford) U3A Horsham & District U3A Maryborough U3A Stawell & District
Region 3 Loddon Mallee (8)	Region 4 North East Victoria (15)
U3A Bendigo U3A Castlemaine U3A Cohuna U3A Heathcote U3A Kerang & District U3A Kyneton U3A Macedon Ranges U3A Sunraysia	U3A Albury-Wodonga U3A Alpine U3A Benalla & District U3A Bright District U3A Cobram & District U3A Euroa & District U3A Goulburn Valley U3A Indigo (Beechworth) U3A Kilmore & District U3A Mansfield U3A Myrteford U3A Murrindindi East (Alexandra, Eildon) U3A Nathalia U3A Seymour & District U3A Wangaratta
Region 5 Gippsland (12)	
U3A Bairnsdale & District U3A Bass Valley U3A Baw Baw (Warragul, Drouin) U3A Lakes Entrance U3A Latrobe Valley U3A Mallacoota & District U3A Mirboo North & District U3A Phillip Island U3A Prom Coast (Foster, Leongatha) U3A Sale U3A Wonthaggi U3A of Yarram	

METROPOLITAN REGIONS (52)	
Region 6 Western Metro (7)	Region 7 Northern Metro (10)
U3A Altona U3A Bacchus Marsh U3A Brimbank (St Albans, Sunshine) U3A Hobsons Bay-Williamstown U3A Melton Campus U3A Moonee Valley U3A Werribee Region	U3A Banyule (Ivanhoe) U3A Chinese in Yarra U3A Darebin (Fairfield, Northcote, Preston) U3A Hume U3A Moreland (Brunswick, Coburg, Glenroy, Fawkner) U3A Nillumbik (Eltham, Hurstbridge) U3A Sunbury U3A Wallan & District U3A Whittlesea (Epping, Thomastown, S.Morang) U3A Yarra City (Abbotsford, Collingwood, Carlton, Richmond)
Region 8 Outer Eastern (6)	Region 9 Eastern (14)
U3A Healesville & District U3A Mt Dandenong & District (Kalorama) U3A Sherbrooke (Upwey) U3A Upper Yarra (Yarra Junc, Warburton) U3A Walmsley Village (Kilsyth) U3A Yarra Ranges (Lilydale)	U3A Box Hill U3A Croydon U3A Deepdene (Kew, Balwyn) U3A Emerald U3A Hawthorn U3A Highvale (Waverley) U3A Knox (Ferntree Gully) U3A Kooyong U3A Manningham (Doncaster, Bulleen) U3A Melbourne Chinese (Box Hill, Doncaster) U3A Nunawading U3A Ringwood U3A Waverley (Mt Waverley, Chadstone) U3A Wheelers Hill
Region 10 Outer South East Metro & Mornington Peninsula (8)	Region 11 Central & Southern Metro (7)
U3A Cardinia (Pakenham) U3A Casey U3A Cranbourne U3A Dandenong U3A Frankston U3A Hastings U3A U3A Mornington U3A Southern Peninsula (Dromana)	U3A Bayside U3A Glen Eira U3A Kingston (Mordialloc) U3A Melbourne City U3A Moorleigh U3A Port Phillip U3A Stonnington