People and Policies

People
We've divided this into the Shed team, general volunteers and specialist volunteers. We are still very much learning as we go (we've bought a lot of goodwill and patience from our community from repeating this in our social media messaging!), so these are thoughts about what's worked for us, rather than hard and fast guidelines. We have tried a few strategies to include some of the under 25s on our board, but so far no luck. We are looking forward to you adding what you've figured out to this resource!

The team
- **Be prepared before you approach people** - if it's just you working on this project, that's how we started! If you're excited and having conversations already, that's brilliant. But equally, we're not saying that you should immediately rush out and try to gather a team. Angela, who was the first to start thinking about a LoT project in Letchworth, prepared a powerpoint presentation, which she printed out to leave with potential board members.
- **Choose people with skills and local ties** One of the best things we did was approach local business owners, who had signs of community engagement in their local shops. Business owners are problem-solvers, extremely practical, and already have a wide network to other local businesses in town. Angela approached the local Vegan Cafe, who were already doing lots of outreach, and the owners of her favourite cake shop, the Bakehouse (she was such a regular customer, she'd gotten a sense of the owners attitudes to community). She left them with the printed-out presentation and time to think. Luckily both said yes and joined the board - it would have been awkward otherwise!
- **Councillors add weight to your project** We had two councillors (the advice we had was to get 'one of each' to avoid looking like a project belonging to either), and they made us look organised and supported. On your local council website, you'll find the councillors who have taken on sustainability- and poverty- related portfolios - a good start!

- **Mention the benefits to them as well** Obviously the big motivators are making real differences in sustainability and/ or accessibility (depending on what you've decided your focus is) in the place you all live. But there are also benefits to being on a board. It grows your personal network, you learn a ton of new things, and it makes a wonderful, substantial addition to a CV.
- **Negotiate together how often you'll meet -** and where and when, and how you'll communicate. When things really started to get going, we met every fortnight at the Bakehouse. We're now down to once a month, but we have a very lively WhatsApp group that is busy every week. It's important to find what works for everyone.

The volunteers
- **Start recruiting early -** this is something we lucked into - we had 6 weeks to revamp the premises before opening, and we were in regularly to receive donations, paint, put up shelves and so on. Because it was summer, we had the door propped open, and people just wandered in. Everyone was interested, some were curious about volunteering, and a couple realised that this was the project for them. We got our wonderful PAT-tester, Len (he used to do it professionally) and volunteer/ Saturday manager/ board member/ Operating Systems Lead (what doesn't he do?) Andrew this way. If you're approached this way, grab names, emails and follow up promptly.
- **Put out a general call -**Write up a role description and get it out in as many ways as you can - newsletter, social media, your local volunteer service's platform, local newspaper if you can, poster on the window, flyers in like-minded cafes and shops. There's a natural turnover to volunteers, as they move away, get jobs, have changes in circumstances at home, and as yet we've never heard any LoT complaining about having too many volunteers.
- **Consider 'taster sessions'** - we reply to anyone who contacts us this way that we run two taster sessions for newbies, so they can see whether it feels like a good fit for them. We let them know that they won't have to learn the cataloguing system at these sessions, and can focus on greeting people, getting items, and generally

getting a feel for the place. A lot of people are put off by the idea of committing to something they're not sure they're going to like, so this takes the pressure off. It also gives you the chance to see if you think they'll be a benefit for your project. Generally unsuitable people can be gently nudged towards agreeing that maybe their skills are a better fit for other roles (it's good to have an idea of what those roles might be - drop-in skills sessions, craft demos, social media content, running festival stalls and so on).

- **Have a volunteer induction and agreement ready to go** - The induction gives them something to sit and read with a cup of tea, and get them past those awkward first few minutes. We've included ours in the 'Our resources' section of the webpage - generally something about how we're pleased to see them, the taster sessions, and health and safety for the day. The agreement is a wise thing another LoT pointed us atl. People are in the main wonderful, people who want to be part of the Sharing Economy especially so, but it is good to be prepared for any outliers. You'll come up with your own agreement, but ours specifies that people will usually turn up on time, be lovely to everyone, not try to sell anything for a different business or evangelise for any religion or group. We agree to supply rosters regularly, cover their transport costs, provide a way for them to complain about anyone if they feel uncomfortable or unwelcome, and so on. This gives you something to push back on if any volunteer proves problematic - *you see how you agreed to this condition? Do you feel you've been doing this?* This isn't something we've had to do as yet, but it's good knowing we have the process in place.

- **If you can, pay transport costs -** we had the lovely idea of paying all our volunteers £4 a session, no awkward questions about who did and didn't need it. However, our treasurer pointed out that this would count as 'income', and therefore attract requirements for employment, pensions and so on. Too much! So instead we encourage our volunteers to bring in parking receipts or bus tickets, which we pay out in cash from the till, and keep the receipts to be logged as 'volunteer expenses'.

- **Never miss a chance to praise a volunteer publicly** - Managing volunteers is different from working with colleagues or employees.

No one's doing it for the money. So it's nice to put some sunshine on them when you can. We had a Christmas Thank You party in 2023, and post about volunteer successes whenever we can. Other LoTs offer things like free memberships, 5 free loans a month and so on - 2025 is our year to investigate how feasible these and other strategies would be. Updates will be posted on the webpage.

- **Take training if you can -** Many support providers offer courses on managing volunteers, some in person and some online (your local volunteer service most likely has training you can access for free). More information is better information, so it's good if you can get to at least one of these.

Specialist Volunteers
- **Ask your general volunteers what they're good at -** After a bit of chat, we often discover that they have a really useful specialism. This is how our PAT-tester, on-call graphic designer, on-call photographer, craft demonstrator, co-manager of the Big Fix, wood-worker and window decorator found us. Not all of these were things we knew we needed, but we grabbed whatever we thought would be useful.
- **Drop-in experts** Once you're established as a 'thing', you'll get people offering their skills - thrilling! Generally, any way you can get someone involved and adding value to the project is good. It's also good to keep in mind that very rarely, you'll be approached by people who want more from you than they're providing to you. A meeting to clarify the person's plan is a good start. Deciding as a team who's appropriate or not to engage with is a good next step. You may have to be clear that while you look terrific, you are working on a limited budget (you may be up for collaboration if you agree to find external funding for the idea). It's also worth thinking about what you want to lend your hard-won standing in the community
- **Businesses** This is something you can build into your pitch to different companies - often they love the idea of engaging beyond just a donation of money or things. You'll come up with your own clever ideas (and we'd like to hear them!). We've had employees

make bespoke display furniture, come in to advise volunteers on what advice to give borrowers about specific items, and run training sessions on particular items.

Policies

You should open your doors for the first time with all policies in place. We absolutely did not do this. A lot of the funding we'd applied for before opening requested policies for sustainability, equality and diversity, website privacy and so on. We went all in on doing the things that were requested, and got on with the practicalities of opening up. Part of the motivation for the webpage is to create a store of these documents, so other groups can start from a stronger position than we did.

- **Start with an official template from a good source -** there's a ton of templates out there, many of them from legal firms, but if possible, rely on the ones from the relevant Government department. For example, we used one from the Information Commissioners Office https://ico.org.uk/ for our privacy policy.
- **Ask another LoT to see their policy** - people can be odd about sharing their policies, possibly because they've put so much work into them. We are aiming to change this, by sharing everything we've put together. If you do get a template from another group, do ask about what they based it on. It's important that if anyone official challenges your policy, you can track your reasoning. Being able to show sincere best efforts to do the right thing will go a long way.
- **Get some free legal advice** LawWorks (https://www.lawworks.org.uk/) was our big find. They allocated us a very qualified solicitor to work on our Terms and Conditions. We insisted on the 'plain English' approach, and they made sure that every claim we made about liability and responsibility was legal, legitimate and enforceable. Can't recommend them enough. We've shared our Ts and Cs on the webpage, and we'd love to share any policies your proud of, too.
- **The best policies are 'living' documents** - the idea is that you include a date for review on the policy, and demonstrate that you're

not only aware of it (instead of having something no one's looked at for years), but updating it and personalising it with your experiences running your project.

- **Appoint someone as head of each policy** It's good to have someone following any updates in the regulations, and to review the policy against what you've discovered while operating.
- **Set up an incident log -** Write down any injuries, accidents or more likely near-misses, with a date, name, details of what happened and action you're taking to address the risk you've discovered. Don't hold back - the advice we had was that an empty log makes any inspector suspicious.