

User Group Handbook

**A Guide to Starting, Building, and Maintaining
Successful Local User Groups and
User Group Associations**

Sponsored by:



A Guide to Starting, Building, and Maintaining a Successful Local User Group and/or User Group Association

6th Edition

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Sponsored by:

Autodesk User Group International (AUGI) and Autodesk, Inc.

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I would like to express my sincere thanks to all who have proofread this edition.

Shaun Bryant, AUGI User Group Director (April 2013).

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Section 1: Introduction

Welcome!

The popular Local Chapter Handbook has been completely updated and revised to become the ***User Group Handbook***. We've added more tips, ideas, and information in a concise, easy-to-use format that will help you start and build a successful Local User Group (LUG) and/or User Group Association (UGA).

As you proceed to Section 2, you will find everything you need to know about starting a Local User Group and/or User Group Association. From a discussion on the benefits it can offer its members to details on planning and conducting your first meeting, you'll get the information you need to start your Local User Group with confidence.

If you are already the founder of an existing AUGI Local Chapter (LC) or Local User Group (LUG) and want to keep it successful, the handbook explains the AUGI User Group structure change to Local User Group (LUG) and User Group Association (UGA).

Section 3 offers excellent suggestions for improving the content of your meetings, ways to establish a membership database, methods for recruiting new members, and much more. Find out how AUGI and Autodesk can support your LUG/UGA, and what help is available on the web. AUGI will also be happy to assist you in converting your LC or older LUG to an AUGI LUG/UGA in the not-too-distant future.

The *Handbook's* online format makes it easy to update. As information changes, we will post the revised pages and/or sections to <http://www.augi.com> — a simple way to ensure you've always got easy access to the most current information.

As you make your way through this step-by-step resource, keep in mind that it provides suggested guidelines - not rules - to apply according to the specific needs of your user group. If you have edits, proposed additions, or comments, please send them to the AUGI User Group Director at ugdirector@augi.com.

We know you'll find this resource helpful and we wish you great success with your User Group endeavours.

Letter from the AUGI President

Dear Autodesk Product User,

The Autodesk User Group International (AUGI) is proud to present the *User Group Handbook*. In this new edition, AUGI has assembled resources and guidelines to help you start and maintain a Local User Group (LUG) or User Group Association (UGA).

AUGI is here to complement User Groups and do whatever we can to further the success of your group. We are confident that you will find the *User Group Handbook* a useful tool in achieving that success. Inside this *Handbook* you will see all that AUGI has to offer a Local User Group—from meeting support and newsletter tips to web-based resources and regional user group meetings.

AUGI is here to help and we encourage you to learn more about us. We thank you for your interest and concern for Autodesk product users and your willingness to dedicate time and energy to serve those users. AUGI looks forward to working with you and your User Group for the benefit of all Autodesk product users worldwide.

Best wishes,

David Harrington
2013 AUGI President

Section 2: What is a Local User Group (LUG) or User Group Association (UGA)?

In order to invigorate AUGI's User Group program, we have simplified to two group definitions. AUGI embraces every User Group that promotes Autodesk products whether they are associated with AUGI or not. Here are our definitions:

Local User Group (LUG)

The Local User Group (LUG) still offers one of the best ways for Autodesk software users to learn the software programs, share knowledge, and network with other users. Local User Groups provide an arena for everything from building your technical skills to building new friendships. And the best part about a LUG is that all of these benefits are available right in your area.

LUG members meet in person on a regular basis. These meetings provide a forum where participants can share knowledge, experience, and advice with fellow users, as well as join in technical discussions with guest speakers.

Most LUGs operate as a private, non-profit or not-for-profit organization that provides support, education, and networking opportunities for its members (users).

There are many different types of Local User Groups. AUGI does not define the type that group leaders create, but we do have two broad categories that we use to define how LUGs interact with AUGI.

Affiliated LUG

Affiliated LUGs are those groups that have chosen to mimic AUGI in structure, purpose and function. They embrace the "Member First" mode of providing what their members need. They embrace the "self governed" mode of leadership in that fellow members manage them. Resellers are encouraged to participate at every level but the leaders of the group come from the group's membership. They are also consistent in promoting AUGI to their membership.

Affiliated LUGs mimic AUGI in structure, purpose and function. Affiliated LUGs have one person who is a Premier AUGI member or higher which enables them to access the self serve features on the AUGI website and change LUG information as they like.

Non-Affiliated LUG

A non-affiliated group may be self governed or run in any manner they choose. Their focus may include promoting AUGI or not. We welcome groups that promote Autodesk products to be listed on our site.

Any type or style of LUG can have information posted on our site with Affiliated AUGI LUGs getting additional benefits so they can become self sufficient in the posting and modification of their information.

While it is true that starting an LUG takes work and dedication, after your LUG is up and running, you'll soon enjoy the numerous benefits it can offer and realize that the preparation, thought, and commitment were well worth the effort.

User Group Association (UGA)

A User Group Association (UGA) represents an association of Local User Groups (LUG), in a known geographical or regional area, whether that be a country, a state or county, or a city or town. If you lead several LUG's you may have a UGA. If you share or coordinate resources and tasks such as lining up speakers, sharing meeting spaces or combine meetings with other LUG's from time to time, you are operating as a UGA.

An example could be the AUGI San Francisco User Group Association (SFUGA) that looks after the San Francisco AutoCAD Local User Group (SFALUG) and the San Francisco Inventor User Group (SFIUG). Whilst these names are fictional, you can see how the new structure works.

A Bit of History

Historically, AUGI used to have County Chapters. These have now become UGA's. For example, AUGI now has country/region focused UGA's in the UK, France and Japan. They still use the prior naming structure; AUGIuk, AUGIfr and AUGIjp.

The previous Local Chapter and Local User Group structure has now been revised and **ALL** Local Chapters and Local User Groups are now classified by AUGI as Local User Groups (LUG). These LUGs may or may not be aligned with a User Group Association (UGA).

The Benefits of a Local User Group (LUG)

Many pleasant surprises await you as your group gets underway. Local User Groups have the potential to provide numerous benefits to any member, both personally and professionally.

LUGs provide an excellent way to learn about a technical aspect of the program that may be difficult to understand. Often another LUG member will have explored it thoroughly and be able to share helpful tips and methods for getting the job done. Your LUG offers dependable and immediate product support — after all, its members are usually intimately familiar with a product’s capabilities, limitations, and workarounds.

New tricks, techniques, and productivity methods

There’s a lot to know about using Autodesk products effectively. The novice, as well as the professional user, will benefit from learning how the programs can be used in different ways to accomplish particular drafting and designing tasks.

Different software and hardware

Few users get hands-on experience with software other than what they use at work. LUG meetings are ideal venues for conducting a variety of technical presentations to get real-world evaluations on the products that members use.

Power users

There are some “power users” who know hundreds of tricks and techniques - and they are likely to be in your Local User Group. Spending a few hours a month with these users can provide you with training you won’t find anywhere else, save you a lot of reading and bug fixing, and give you a wealth of helpful, undocumented information.

Job opportunities

Many people who attend Local User Group meetings are from companies in your area and some may be looking to hire new staff. At a LUG meeting, you will have the opportunity to speak with these potential employers and find out how their companies use Autodesk products.

Connection to Autodesk

It can be difficult to keep up with new trends in technology. To help users stay up-to-date, Autodesk annually participates in and conducts trade shows, conferences, and productivity seminars around the world. Most likely, one or more of your LUG members will attend these events and bring information back to your group. There are also several Autodesk-related magazines and books that members can take turns purchasing, reading, and sharing what they learn with the group—a cost-effective way for LUG members to stay current.

Opinions, philosophies and experience

There are many ways to use Autodesk products effectively. You may get differing or conflicting opinions from other users about how to best install, implement, and customize the software you use, but a room full of experienced critics is a precious resource at purchasing time.

Autodesk resellers

Occasionally, authorized Autodesk resellers will attend a LUG meeting to seek out new business. They will often support your group financially and offer product demos, presentations, and other resources. Leveraging resellers is a great way to keep them interested in your Local User Group.

Autodesk and AUGI support

Every year, Autodesk and AUGI contribute resources and time in support of User Groups. If your User Group is registered, you'll be included in special programs, events, and benefits Autodesk and AUGI offer. These can include joint user group meetings with AUGI, beta-testing opportunities, and publicity resources. Joining an LUG is a great way to stay personally connected to Autodesk and AUGI.

Recognition and support by the local professional community

Many local businesses work with LUGs by providing speakers and technicians, raffle prizes, meeting facilities, or product discounts. These businesses effectively let the community know that your organization exists. Among the organizations known to support AUGI's Local User Groups are reprographics companies, software and hardware vendors, colleges, technical institutes, and universities as well as TV and radio stations (for public announcements and event calendars) in some areas of the world.

Socializing

LUGs offer the perfect opportunity to develop solid friendships. Besides discussing product issues, Local User Group members often meet for purposes completely unrelated to Autodesk software!

Free therapy

Working in a production environment can sometimes be overwhelming. LUGs can provide the opportunity to share your workplace frustrations with other members who can, in turn, offer advice and empathy. Many users find that the chaos in their workplace is, unfortunately, typical!

Forming and sustaining a Local User Group takes work, time, dedication, and determination. Bringing a group of highly skilled and busy people together regularly can be tough, but once you know what your members need and how to create productive meetings, everyone will benefit.

Section 3: Starting a Local User Group

Getting Started

How AUGI can help

Once you've decided to start a Local User Group, your next step should be to contact the AUGI User Group Director to register your group as a Local User Group on the AUGI website.

Gathering a Core Team

Dedicated individuals are the driving force behind many successful Local User Groups—they have a vision for the group and work hard to make it happen. When gathering your core team, try to find people who are as driven and committed as you are to get the group started and keep it going.

Tips for establishing your core team

- Know the objectives and focus of your group, what you think will make it successful, and how often you will re-evaluate what keeps it that way. For example, a group's objective may be to increase its members' productivity with AutoCAD and have at least 25 people attend each meeting.
- Find out who enjoys certain tasks, and do your best to assign those duties accordingly.
- It's wise to develop a back-up plan in case someone can't fulfil his/her usual task and to rotate responsibilities to avoid burnout. Check in with your volunteers regularly to see how they're doing.
- Determine the best time for the group organizers to meet so that you can plan the LUG meetings in advance.
- Be sensitive to the lives, workload, and responsibilities of your volunteer members.
- Keep meetings concise and conveniently located, and begin and end them promptly.
- Accommodating the member's schedules as best you can and be understanding if members can't attend occasionally due to prior obligations.

- Provide an agenda to your core team before each meeting.
- Don't promise your members things you can't yet deliver. Instead, work at a reasonable pace to develop the group's resources and benefits, and encourage your members to participate in this development.
- Every member of your LUG has something to offer—make sure everyone is given the opportunity to prove it!

Remember, your members are your LUGs greatest assets!

Your First Meeting

Your first meeting is crucial to the overall success of your Local User Group. If you are inadequately prepared or start the meeting on a bad note, attendees may walk away with a poor first impression and may not return for the next session. Remember, first impressions do count.

This section of the handbook provides a number of tips to help your first meeting go smoothly. Although some items may seem obvious, it's always wise to make a thorough checklist and stick to it. (For additional details on speakers, meeting tips, and more, see Section 4).

Set a time and day

Finding a time and day that accommodates the majority of potential attendees can be tricky. For some, the best time might be in the evening or during the workday; for others, it's best to meet during lunch.

We suggest that you offer everyone a few options and schedule the meeting based on the needs of the majority. Whichever day and time is chosen, be sure to plan the meeting far enough in advance so that users may adjust their schedules to attend this important first meeting. A typical first meeting is usually planned two months in advance.

Reserve a meeting facility

Meeting facilities and resources vary depending on what your city has to offer. A LUG can use membership dues to rent a facility or use free or low-cost public and community meeting rooms, educational centers, or Autodesk dealerships. To ensure you have a suitable facility for the first meeting, ask yourself these questions.



Location

- What kind of an impression will the facility make on new members?
- Is it well lit and in a safe part of town?
- Is it quiet? Are there disruptive background noises?
- Is it centrally located to your geographical area of interest?
- Is it capable of holding the number of attendees you expect?
- Is the seating comfortable?
- Does it provide for those who are disabled?
- Can people sitting in the back of the facility see and hear people in the front?
- Is there adequate parking for attendees and access for loading and unloading?
- Are there restrooms for women, men, and disabled people?

Resources

- Does it offer flexible seating for presentations?
- Can it accommodate computer equipment for demos and instruction?
- Does it have projection equipment, blackboards, or other visual aids?
- Is there space for a vendor demo area?
- Does it have Internet connectivity that can be used?

Policies

- Can it be scheduled or reserved months in advance?
- Is food, alcoholic beverages, or smoking allowed? What are the general policies?
- What are the hours of the facility?

Apart from your own place of business, there are many other facilities that work well as meeting places. Check your area for the following:

- Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts/4H
- Library
- Business conference hall
- Mall or shopping center
- Chamber of commerce
- Restaurant or pub
- College or technical institute
- Performing arts center or museum
- Computer store or bookstore
- Public school gym/auditorium
- Convention center
- Religious/ethnic/cultural center

- Distributor conference room
- Reseller training room
- Government agency facility
- Theater
- Hospital or health center
- Utility company's conference hall
- Hotel/motel meeting room
- YMCA or YWCA

Recruit a speaker

At your first meeting, it's essential that the featured speaker have adequate presentation skills to welcome, inspire, and inform the attendees. The wrong personality in this position can ruin a meeting, yet finding an entertaining, effective, informative speaker can be challenging.

Speakers should be able to handle a variety of responses from the audience including complaints, insults, and defeatist comments. It is wise to meet with the speaker ahead of time to review his/her outline, which can help avoid surprises during the presentation. For example, if you don't want any sales pitches, let the speaker know and check the outline carefully.

Here are some suggestions for potential presenters:

- An Autodesk representative
- An AUGI representative
- Local dealership employee (reseller)
- Manufacturer of a popular hardware or third-party software program
- Manager or representative of a large local company involved in design
- Local technical teachers or a representative from a technical support center
- Employee from a local company that supports networks or Internet technologies
- Nationally known technology gurus—such as Autodesk University instructors and published authors— who live in your area
- Autodesk Training Center (ATC) instructor
- Local “power user”

Another way to find a good speaker is to ask members of your group for suggestions.

The first meeting is an excellent opportunity to have a member(s) submit a list of topics they find interesting and to offer suggestions for speakers who can address those topics.



Create a meeting agenda

Depending on the meeting time, your attendees may just be getting off work, have had a long day, or need to get home to their families by a certain hour.

It's best to create a meeting agenda and stick to it. Start on time, present activities on time, and end on time.

In order to do this, you need to decide the duration of the meeting (make sure the facility will stay open) and have a bulleted list of items you wish to address. Refer to this list throughout the meeting; otherwise, it's easy to get distracted by all the excitement.

When creating the meeting agenda, decide upon the following:

- What goal is the group trying to achieve?
- Do you want to review new products at the meeting?
- Is the meeting for learning tips and tricks?
- Is it a social gathering or a professional business occasion?
- Is it a job-opportunity marketplace or a classroom?

Having a clear vision of where the group should be in six months will also help in preparing each meeting, organizing the people and resources involved, and determining the purpose of future meetings.

Ask your group for help — your first meeting is an opportune time to ask the attendees what type of meeting format they'd like to use in the future.

Other details

- **Refreshments**

Many User Groups get off to a great start by offering sandwiches, pizza, or beverages. Make sure the facility permits food and/or alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

To cover costs, you can either charge a small fee at the door or ask a local business to sponsor your meeting.

It's also a good idea to recruit volunteers for the cleanup committee so you leave the facility as clean as you found it.

- **Prizes and giveaways**

Local businesses and manufacturers may wish to contribute prizes in exchange for recognition or the chance to give a presentation. Talk to the companies and organizations your LUG members either work for or belong to - there's nothing like the possibility of winning something to get people excited about joining a LUG! Make it topical or industry-specific maybe?

- **Meeting dues**

Traditionally, there isn't a charge for the first meeting unless there are refreshment or facility costs to cover.

"Dues for future meetings" may be a good agenda item for your first meeting as well—member feedback is always welcome on this topic.

When choosing a method, keep in mind whose attendance you're trying to get—the people who purchase Autodesk products, the people who use them, or both?

Note: If you plan to collect dues, be sure to bring various types of change and specify how checks are to be made out.

Attracting users to your meeting

There are a variety of other ways to let the local Autodesk product community know about your group and the initial meeting; however, some methods require more work than others.

Here are some ideas:

- We live in a world of technological advantage; use your social media skills to promote and gain membership! Consider setting up a Facebook page or group, gain followers on Twitter and get a group going on LinkedIn. This way you can promote your meetings to ALL of your LUG members quickly and easily. To get some ideas, check out the AUGI social media pages.
- Contact your local TV/radio stations and newspapers to see if they have a public service or events calendar program or section. If so, provide them with meeting and contact information.

- Create flyers using your Autodesk software or other favourite graphics program and distribute them to local businesses.
- Ask business owners to mention them to local businesses related to your LUG at their seminars and classes and perhaps distribute the flyer with their products. Give them a good incentive to do so.

Conducting Your First Meeting

Make a plan - and expect the unexpected!

Despite a solid agenda, Local User Group meetings don't always go as planned. Conversations can sometimes take an unanticipated turn; strong personalities may alter the group dynamics - there are a variety of unforeseen challenges that can arise.

Here are some true first-meeting surprises:

- The owners of the meeting facility forgot they were hosting the meeting and all of the attendees were locked out of the building.
- The facility lost power in the middle of the meeting.
- The map to the meeting location was incorrect and everyone who attempted to attend got lost.
- The meeting organizer forgot the scheduled meeting night so nobody was there to coordinate the session.
- The meeting organizers forgot to bring the materials.
- A scheduling conflict for the use of the facility forced one group to move to a different location.
- The meeting was held, but nobody attended.

Be prepared!

Having a backup plan is a good idea in case you run into problems like these. Here are some ways to prevent them.

- Double-check your directions to the meeting site.
- Make a list of everything you need to bring.
- Assign a backup coordinator in case you suddenly can't attend.
- Call ahead of time to make sure that the facility is still available for your meeting.

Member questionnaire

Now that you worked so hard to get everyone to attend, don't miss this opportunity to build a membership database!

Having members sign in and complete a questionnaire you've prepared can provide information that's beneficial to all attendees.

Ask members to read portions of their questionnaire out loud to the group — it provides an excellent way to open the meeting and gives attendees an opportunity to share a little about themselves.

Following are some items your questionnaire could include:

- Name, company, company address and phone, home phone, fax, email and the best way to be reached.
- Autodesk product versions used and in what capacity; third-party software used; number of years of experience with the products; areas of expertise.
- Professional discipline, formal education, and affiliation with other professional organizations or user groups.
- Conferences attended each year.
- Best and worst days and times for Local User Group meetings.



- Suggested topics for future meetings; the greatest benefit of a LUG; the most significant reason for attending the meeting.
- Skills or resources they can offer to help organize the meeting and to build the group, and the amount of time they can spend on the group each month.

Note: Remember to ask members if they prefer that information provided on the questionnaires be kept confidential or shared with the group.

Distribute information when the meeting begins

Not only is your first meeting the best time to collect information—it's also the best time to distribute information.

Following are some basic items you might want to consider handing to every attendee before the meeting begins:

- Name tags.
- Pens or pencils and paper for taking notes.
- Business cards for the group or a group contact list.
- Any and all questionnaires and forms you will want them to fill out during the meeting.
- A raffle ticket.
- Product literature, discounts, or other related information. This is an excellent way for speakers to inform the attendees about products and sales without actually using meeting time to discuss them.

Elect officers if needed

Many Local User Groups elect officers to fulfil certain duties in the organization. It's a good idea to rotate these functions to avoid burnout and to keep ideas fresh.

Below is a list of suggested officers and their sample duties.

(These are guidelines only. Officers are not a requirement for any Local User Group).

In order to keep the discussions, topics and content independent, it is AUGI's position that resellers are not part of the leadership team, (i.e., President, Vice President, Secretary or Treasurer Positions).

If your group decides to elect officers, the membership should determine the following:

- The duration of each office (i.e. a year, six months, one quarter).
- Whether each officer is expected to attend monthly meetings or if they must notify other officers when they can't attend.

- Which officers must contribute to the monthly newsletter, website, meetings, etc.
- Consequences or process of resignation if an officer fails to meet his or her responsibilities.
- Whether a quorum is needed to conduct business.

Elected positions may include the following:

- **President/Chairperson**

The president presides over meetings; largely organizes the meeting time, location, and guest speakers; represents the group to other user groups or the professional community; and serves as the main contact for AUGI and Autodesk as well as his or her fellow LUG members.

- **Vice President**

The vice president presides over meetings in the absence of the president; assists the president with meeting preparations; coordinates membership programs and resources; and represents the group to the professional community, Autodesk, or other user groups when the president is unavailable to do so.

- **Secretary**

The secretary maintains the organization's library of work files, programs, and customized resources or utilities available to all members; records the minutes of each meeting for those who could not attend; maintains a calendar of events; and is the primary contact for all members regarding group-related information.

- **Treasurer**

The treasurer is responsible for collecting the annual dues; establishing the group's bank account; maintaining an accurate list of members in good standing as well as the master database; providing a report of the organization's expenses; coordinating membership drives; and processing requests for purchases.

- **Editor**

Should your LUG want to publish a newsletter, the editor is responsible for overseeing it and making sure it includes articles from officers, members, AUGI, and other Autodesk user groups, as well as a calendar of upcoming product-related events.

In addition, the editor manages the production and distribution of the newsletter and posts it to the LUG website (if the group decides to establish one).

This position is often combined with “Webmaster” (see below).

- **Webmaster**

If the LUG has a website or uses AUGI LUG pages, the webmaster is responsible for maintaining it.

All message and file traffic will be monitored for compliance with website guidelines set by officers and will be open to the public with special privileges given to paying members.

It should be noted that a webmaster need not be knowledgeable about web technologies; rather, the webmaster would coordinate content for the site and distribute the work to those with web- maintenance skills.

- **Education Coordinator**

If the group works with training centers, colleges, or universities, the education coordinator is responsible for keeping these institutions up to date regarding the LUG and various LUG events, and to devise ways in which to represent the organization at these institutions.

The Education Coordinator can also work with Autodesk and AUGI for educational LUG meeting resources.

Concluding Your First Meeting

Just as you needed a checklist to begin the meeting, you also need a checklist to end it.

Here are some tips for concluding your first meeting:

- Clarify when and where the next gathering will take place and what you have planned for it.
- Remind members of their action items, if any, for the next meeting.
- Make sure to collect all questionnaires, if any were distributed.
- Thank the speakers who presented and/or members who helped organize the meeting.
- Thank all members for attending.
- Gather all trash and leave the facility as clean as you found it.

Establishing Bylaws and a Group Charter

Many Local User Groups establish bylaws and a group charter at the first meeting. It's helpful to have a template, such as the one below, to use as a foundation. As the group grows, the bylaws can be re- evaluated.

Sample bylaws

The sample bylaws below should be used as a guideline.

Note: Bylaws (and officers as noted in the bylaws) are not required for any User Group.

At a minimum, however, your group should have a brief statement describing the group's mission or purpose.

I. NAME

The name of this organization shall be the _____ Local User Group.



II. PURPOSE

The _____ Local User Group shall be a non-profit organization whose main focus shall be to educate, enhance, and enlighten its members in the effective application of Autodesk software products. This will be accomplished by holding monthly meetings at which time various uses of Autodesk software, third-party software, and design, drafting and/or productivity issues will be discussed and evaluated. The group will exchange information about Autodesk products and/or other third party products. The organization leaders will keep its membership informed of upcoming events and/or new developments in software and hardware. The group and its members agree to respect and comply with copyright and license arrangements that exist with the producers of products they use and own. They will remain independent of any commercial interests.

III. MEMBERSHIP

Membership shall be vested in individuals who use or are interested in using Autodesk software products for any purpose. Qualification as a member shall require payment of annual dues as specified in Section IV.

IV. DUES

Annual dues will be collected to cover the expense of monthly meetings, newsletter production and distribution, and any other expenses of the organization.

Dues will be \$_____per person per year and will be collected by the Treasurer. Dues to new members will be pro-rated at \$_per month.

V. MEETINGS

Regular meetings will be held on the _____of every month. The meetings will be held at a designated time. The location and minutes of each meeting will be published in the monthly newsletter and by fax/email broadcasting one week prior to each meeting.

The order of business is as follows:

1. Meeting opened by presiding officer.
2. Officer reports/business of the organization.
3. Speaker / presentation /demonstration.
4. Special Interest Group (SIG) reports / any final business.
5. Meeting closed / open forum discussion.

VI. OFFICERS

The officers of the _____ Local User Group will be elected annually and shall consist of the following positions:

President shall preside over meetings and shall be responsible for the meeting's time, location, and guest speakers.

Vice President shall preside over meetings in the absence of the President and assist the President with meeting preparations.

Secretary shall maintain the LUG's library of drawings, programs, and customized resources, which will be available to all members. The Secretary shall also maintain the membership database.

Treasurer shall be responsible for collecting the annual dues from, and maintaining an accurate list of, members in good standing. The Treasurer shall provide an annual report of the LUG's expenses in the newsletter.

Editor shall be responsible for the monthly newsletter that will include articles from officers, members, AUGI, and other Autodesk user groups, as well as a calendar of upcoming industry-related events.

Webmaster shall be responsible for maintaining the organization's website. All message and file traffic will be monitored for compliance with website guidelines set by officers and will be open to the public with special privileges given to paid members.

Education Coordinator shall be responsible for keeping the local Autodesk training centres informed of the organization's events and benefits and to represent the organization at these sites.

Each officer is expected to attend the monthly meetings and shall notify the President if he or she is unable to make a meeting. All officers are expected to contribute to the monthly newsletter by submitting articles. If an officer fails to meet his or her responsibilities, a special election may be held and a new officer elected. A two-thirds majority vote is required to elect an officer.

Recommended Dues Structures

Autodesk User Groups around the world use a variety of structures for collecting dues. Typically, dues cover the cost of expenses such as publishing and mailing the monthly newsletter, maintaining the website, refreshments, door prizes for meetings, and membership memorabilia (e.g., T-shirts).

Dues structures

Below are examples of several dues structures. Use the one that best suits your LUG's needs and goals:

Structure #1: Brainless and Painless

All current members pay annual dues of \$__ on January 1.

Members joining after January 1 pay \$_____per month remaining in the year to equal the cost of a regular annual membership.

This plan makes book-keeping simple for the Treasurer and the users.

Structure #2: Committed and Accountable

All current members pay annual dues of \$__for one year beginning the month they join. Their membership shall be renewable one year later. The Treasurer keeps a separate record of the date each member joined.

This structure reduces the need for collecting fees throughout the year. Each individual's membership expiration date is conveniently printed on the mailing label of every monthly newsletter, if mailed.

Structure #3: Flexible and Fair

Individual membership is \$_____per year, renewable annually.

Officer membership shall be free while the position is held.

Corporate membership is \$_____per year, renewable annually (companies must provide a list of currently employed members who might attend).

Student membership is \$_____per year, renewable annually (student ID shall be required for student membership).

Here the dues are relative to a member's income and/or expertise. Officers are rewarded for their efforts, students are given a break, and large companies can afford to send an employee to attend a particular meeting.

Structure #4: Pot Luck

Attendance is \$_____ at the door. Name, company, and phone number of each attendee is required. The meetings are open to the public and guest sessions may include product demonstrations.

This plan doesn't require bookkeeping. The meetings are typically well-planned to draw good crowds. Fees allow for better meeting facilities and no commitment is required of attendees. Officers have a great incentive each month to make the meeting valuable.

Structure #5: Telethon

No dues are required by members; however, each year members must attend and participate in several group fund-raising events that will be held to pay for the group's expenses. Speakers are required to either contribute door prizes during the meeting or pay a negotiated fee to make a presentation.

Willing members can pay website or other group fees.

This structure requires dynamic leadership, a friendly rapport with local businesses, and an active end-user community that will contribute based on return benefit.

Structure #6: Jam Session

Members are not required to pay dues. They meet at an Authorized Autodesk Training Center or local college lab and talk about open topics for an hour, sharing "war stories," and discussing upcoming Autodesk product-related events. There is no newsletter nor are any resources offered, but the meeting is held at the same time and place each month.

This structure doesn't leave one person responsible for keeping the group going. Those who show up benefit—it is, in the truest sense, more of a social occasion and works well with people who work together frequently, especially within the same company.



Structure #7: Raffle Prizes

No dues are required by members. Instead, charge a minimum of \$1 for raffle tickets. Be sure to have enough so that every attendee gets at least one ticket and the opportunity to buy more if desired. And the raffle prize? Consider something relevant to the LUG or perhaps get an organization or company involved where one of your members works. It would be great kudos (and PR!) for them.

This structure can generate a lot of money in some cases, particularly if the raffle prizes are popular and valuable.

Meeting Checklist

This checklist will help ensure that you've completed all the tasks necessary to hold your first Local User Group meeting. (Feel free to make copies of this checklist and use it for all of your meetings.)

1. Set date and time

Date is: _____ Time is: _____

2. Reserve meeting facility

Location is: _____

Directions and/or map: _____

3. Obtain speaker
4. Create the agenda
5. Arrange for delivery of refreshments
6. Obtain prizes and giveaways
7. Create promotional flyers and mail to prospective attendees

Enjoy your first meeting... and good luck!

Section 4: Building a Successful Local User Group

Now that you've established a Local User Group, you need to keep up the momentum. Just as starting the group took effort and dedication, so does building upon its foundation. A successful user group is one that benefits all its members and provides a place where users can learn, share ideas, and have fun.

There are many ways to build a successful group — from providing motivational speakers, Q&A sessions, and educational demos to encouraging community involvement and taking part in trade shows. We offer many suggestions, as you'll see in this next section, and encourage you to build upon these ideas according to your group's needs.

Be prepared to put forth energy and hard work—and be equally prepared to reap the benefits as your LUG grows.

Defining Success

If you ask a sample of users what makes a Local User Group successful, you'll get a wide range of responses. Here are a few examples.

Jan: "My Local User Group consists of just five people. We meet for lunch every Friday and discuss whatever software problems we're having. It's nice to get out of the office and talk to other people who use the same software I do. Sometimes they have a problem I can solve, and many times I have a problem that they can solve. We also call each other during work hours whenever we have a crisis."

Michael: "Our Local User Group meets once a month and there are usually about 50 people. Our meeting has a formula: we welcome everyone, introduce the speaker and then have an open floor question-and-answer session. Our productivity segment follows, allowing members to share a software feature they think other users may not know about. And when that's done, we all go out for beer."

Mark: "Our company has an internal User Group. We all work on the same drawings so our meetings are basically a rap session. We get to tell the CAD Manager our concerns or someone may have a speed enhancing tip to share. We get new drafters all the time so we're always learning something new that we can immediately apply to our work. Our group meets every Wednesday for lunch and the company requires that everyone attend. It has worked out well for us."

Susan: “When students sign up for my class, they immediately become members of the Local User Group. I bring in people from the professional community who use AutoCAD every day to talk about how they use it and share any advice they have for us. The benefit for the students is that they get to see real world drawings and talk to someone who uses the software daily. These meetings also help me generate new ideas for homework and labs.”

The “formula” for success will be different for each group. As you build your LUG, you might want to take the following into consideration:

- Is a large membership important, and if so, why?
- Is a variety of out-of-town speakers essential, or do you prefer local presenters?
- Is a longer meeting better?
- Is it more helpful to focus on a specific discipline or on a variety of disciplines?
- Should your group adhere strictly to Autodesk product discussions or should other CAD software be recognized, too?
- How should members expect to benefit?
- What do you gain by volunteering for this effort?

And, as the months of meetings go by, you can do a “success status check” by taking note of the following:

- Are you and the members meeting professionals from a variety of local companies? In other words, is the group networking?
- Are the members learning new information about Autodesk products that they might not otherwise learn?
- Are they learning new product features that help them in their jobs?
- Are members helping to solve each other’s product-related problems that couldn’t necessarily be solved by the usual product support channels?

After a year of regular meetings, review your progress and see if you've met your goals and why (or why not).

Bring the officers and/or the entire membership into these reviews so that everyone can measure the group's progress and goals for the coming year.

A Successful Meeting

Conducting a successful meeting takes planning. We offer these guidelines and suggestions—from choosing appropriate meeting topics to the perks you offer members—to help you keep your LUG meetings running smoothly.

When deciding how often your user group should meet, ask yourself these questions.

1. How much time do you have to organize each meeting?
2. When do meetings begin and how long do they last?

Based on how you answer these questions, choose the meeting frequency format that works best for your group.

The quarterly meeting

Some of the most successful Local User Groups meet only four times a year (once a quarter). Because the meetings are infrequent, they are usually a big event and people generally make an effort to attend. Having only four meetings a year makes it easier to offer more benefits as well as get several speakers to attend and sponsors to invest.

With this format, it's a good idea to choose dates for all four meetings at once so members can mark their calendars in advance. Because these meetings tend to draw substantial crowds, they should be held in a large facility, and you should choose several coordinators to help you.

It is vital that the agenda for these meetings cover topics pertinent to all user levels.

This type of meeting may be a difficult format for a new group to master.

**The monthly meeting**

The most common format, monthly meetings require regular planning but do not have to be as concentrated in their benefits as quarterly meetings because more topics can be addressed over the year.

People tend to find monthly meetings easy to remember; however, monthly user groups often face summer slumps or seasonal hardships, especially during holidays.

The weekly meeting

Many companies, schools, and dealerships hold weekly meetings for their employees, students, or clients in the form of “power lunches,” early morning breakfasts, office meetings, or study sessions.

The benefit of this format is that members can get instant information on a topic, issue, problem, or concern that may have arisen that week. However, meeting this often can become more of a burden than a benefit if meetings aren’t kept short, helpful, and applicable to everyone who attends, regardless of skill level. Some weekly groups meet as a social gathering outside the office.

Others require mandatory attendance, which can damage a group like this as members’ personal lives may (understandably) interfere with meetings held this often.

The random meeting

There are a few groups that don’t adhere to a set schedule but, instead, meet from time to time when everyone’s schedules allow.

For example, if a hot topic comes up or if a popular presenter comes through town, the group members alert each other and decide whether or not to meet.

The advantage of this format is that it doesn’t raise expectations of regular attendance and every meeting is spontaneous.

However, interest in the group can wane if meetings are held too infrequently or if they are poorly planned.

The annual (seminar) meeting

Some groups meet for several days at a time each year. By promoting the meeting far in advance and by presenting it as an “event” rather than a meeting, workers can often take off more time for more intense sessions. This format has the advantage of tackling complex or lengthy topics and often provides good speakers and sponsors.

It also appeals to many employers since it is held only once a year; however, it isn’t the best solution for the user who simply can’t miss a few days of work at once.

Meeting frequency formats aren’t limited to the ones we suggest above, but hopefully they will give you some ideas. If you’re unsure how often to hold your meetings, raise the issue with the members. Most LUG members aren’t shy with their opinions!

Meeting formats that work

It’s always a good idea to keep your meetings fresh. Following are ideas for different meeting formats you can use throughout the year.

Each style serves a different function. You will want to develop your own format to best serve the goals you have for your group.

Format #1: “Tonight’s Special Guest...”

- The presiding officer opens the meeting and introduces the officers.
- General group business is discussed.
- The guest speaker is introduced and gives a presentation.
- A question-and-answer session is held.
- Raffle prizes are given away.
- The date and guest speaker for the next meeting is announced.

This format relies heavily on the expertise of outsiders willing to take the time to visit the group.

Plus: Outside guests and information can be refreshing and entertaining.

Minus: Usefulness of the presentation for members is unpredictable and you may end up getting a hard sales pitch.

Format #2: The On-Going Demo

- The presiding officer opens the meeting.
- Newsletters are distributed while an explanation of the officers and group resources is given.
- A question-and-answer session is held.
- A local dealer or consultant is introduced and gives a product overview or demonstration.
- Group business is briefly discussed before breaking for pizza and drinks.

This format relies primarily on a dealer's personal agenda and typically focuses on solutions you can purchase, rather than how best to use what you already have. Usually, equipment must be brought in.

Plus: Members get exposed to many technologies.

Minus: A sales agenda can lead to "demo stupor."

Format #3: Panel of Experts

- All officers welcome the group, introduce themselves, and describe their function.
- Attending members are asked to introduce themselves and their company.
- A panel (which could consist of representatives from Autodesk) is introduced to discuss the meeting topic.
- A question-and-answer session is held.
- The next meeting's topic is announced.

- A new panel is suggested and SIGs (special interest groups) break off for discussion.

This format relies primarily on the expertise within the group.

Plus: You hear more than one opinion on a given issue.

Minus: Finding enough experts to make a panel could be challenging.

Format #4: The Laboratory

- The treasurer reminds members to renew their dues. (This applies to most meeting formats).
- The presiding officer reminds members of the meeting's problem topic.
- The members break into work groups (using workstations if available) and discuss solutions to the evening's topic.
- The groups reconvene to share their solutions over refreshments.

This format requires members to have hands-on access to software- loaded workstations.

Plus: Hands-on learning.

Minus: It's difficult to find facilities to accommodate a large group.

Meeting tips

Here are a few ideas to keep in mind, regardless of the format you choose:

- **Keep meetings a reasonable length**

Three hours is the ideal maximum. A longer meeting is not necessarily a better meeting. Remember, most of the people attending have been using the software all day.

- **Appeal to users of all levels**

Don't focus strictly on one discipline or one specialized use of the software unless the material is beneficial to most users. Assume half the room has never seen the software and that the other half has been using it for years. It's a tough balance, but essential if you want members to keep coming back.

- **Allow interaction**

If the meeting is simply one long lecture, you may discourage members from participating or returning for the next meeting.

If fitting, encourage open forums, mini-presentations, or questions so that users can take useful information back to work the next day.

- **Don't favor an outside interest**

Allow a fair distribution of presentation time to outside businesses, non-Autodesk product manufacturers, and non-majority discipline specialists.

If there is a hidden product preference agenda, be honest about it (see Format #2).

Discourage business cliques and avoid negative product discussion. Most products deserve some level of praise and you never know who might be fond of what. Negative energy yields negative results.



Speaker guidelines

As you know from your meetings, good speakers are essential. But there are a variety of problems that can arise with outside speakers or sponsors. Your group should decide how to handle these sorts of situations **before** they occur.

- **The pure sales pitch**

Although it can be helpful to learn more about products on the market, a hard sell can be offensive. Tell the speaker or sponsor your group's focus and ask them to speak to that.

- **Debates**

Take care in how you mix competitive sponsors or speakers. Be prepared for discussions to get...*lively*.

- **The no-show**

Sometimes speakers can't make it at the last minute, so it's always a good idea to have a backup presenter or "filler" to carry the meeting if the speaker is simply running late.

- **Great content, terrible delivery**

Despite being knowledgeable on the topic, some speakers have a poor delivery.

If possible, try to find out if the speaker has done presentations before, for whom, and if those presentations were effective.

If you find that the speaker is not a good presenter, limit his/her talk to 15 minutes.

Topic tips

Before choosing a topic, be sure to consider doing the following:

- Ask your group what they would like to discuss.
- Cover basic and advanced aspects of the topic so that the novice and the professional can benefit from and contribute to the discussion.
- Have topics that focus on a variety of disciplines, rather than just one in particular.



- If a speaker is not a member of the user group, prepare him or her for the group's "personality" and vice versa.
- Remind everyone why the topic is being discussed and encourage open minds and digressions.
- Look beyond the Autodesk product focus. There are tools common in everyone's office that can benefit users as much as any Autodesk product features.

Ideas for Meeting Topics

Coming up with interesting ideas for meetings can be a real challenge. Here are some suggestions, divided into three groups:

1. General LUG topics.
2. Topics for AutoCAD users (which is not intended to limit Local User Groups to this product alone, but rather to serve as an example of a product-focused meeting).
3. Other popular topics.

As always, these topics are intended only as guidelines.

General topics

Creating or updating resumes

- Discuss resume formats used for your industry.
- Show examples.
- Invite local employers to discuss what they look for in a resume and in an interview.

Autodesk Training Centers

- Overview of available resources and courses.
- Certification programs and requirements.
- The pros and cons of certification.
- Current certification-testing software simulators.

Viruses

- Symptoms, prevention and remedies.
- Overview of available utilities.
- How infection occurs and spreads.

Internet Resources

- World Wide Web.
- Newsgroups.
- File Transfer Protocol (FTP).
- Weblogs (blogs).
- Feeds (RSS, etc).
- Wikis.
- Skype/Yahoo Voice, etc.

**Upcoming conferences pertinent to your field**

- How to budget for conferences.
- Ways to keep travel costs down.
- How conferences can benefit your entire office.
- Valuable resources offered from previously attended conferences.

Writing code in your office

- Tools and technologies already provided in the software.
- Compilers that integrate with your current software.
- Benefits of custom tailoring you own applications.
- Ways to present programming as profitable within your company.
- Examples of customized applications.

AutoCAD topics**Beginners**

- PLINE/PEDIT: Explore those options rarely used, such as vertex editing and splines; the differences between 2D and 3D polylines.
- UCS uses in 2D drafting, rotation alignments, diagonal and fitted rectangular and polar arrays, Quadrant and ORTHO rotations.
- 3D surfacing, xyz filters, FILTER selection methods, DVIEW and its options, hidden line removal and extrusion vs. faces, front and back clip planes.
- Paper space and model space (Layout tab and Model tab).
- External references.
- Customizing fonts, hatch patterns, and linetypes.
- Discuss the various AutoCAD file types.
- Render functions, point and direct light sources, preferences, materials and mapping
- SAVEIMG, MSLIDE, PLOT to Raster File Export, and the differences between them.

Intermediate

- ASE, linkage to .DBF files, SQL editor and creation of .DBF using it, displayable attributes, and updating queried selection sets.
- LISP for beginners, introduction to variable types, basic functions and math hierarchies, explanation of manual symbology.
- DIESEL,MODEMACRO and text functions to control status line display, basic overview of system variables, examples of usage.
- AutoCAD on easy networks, setup, hardware and software required, training resources, required maintenance.
- AutoCAD-related websites, communications software and setup, shareware alternatives, Autodesk and AUGI websites and available resources.
- Compression schemes, tape backup systems, zip and jazz drives and other specialized systems, archiving utilities and hardware.



- Symbol library resources on CD, floppy disks, and websites available from manufacturers such as Sweets, Carrier, Anderson, Kohler, and so on.
- DXF structure, text creation of DWG, differences between releases, working with older versions of AutoCAD.

Advanced

- Visual Basic and AutoCAD.
- VB.NET & C#.NET.
- Visual LISP & AutoLISP.
- DCL (dialog control language), basic functions, examples, AutoCAD .DCL files, all interfaces, required LISP fundamentals.
- Intro to ObjectARX®, workable 32-bit compilers, ARX Manual layout, analogous functions to LISP, sample code.
- SDK toolkit, libraries, utilities, versions, encryption schemes, documentation layout, registered developer status, legalities.
- Extended entity data, XDATA, dotted pair structure, LISP functions (xdroom, regapp, etc.), benefits.
- Using (entmake), (entdel), (entnext), (entget), (entmod), (entupd) and other entities.
- Related LISP functions for faster editing.
- Driver configuration for plotters, graphics cards, digitizers and other input devices, port assignments.
- Complex entity construction and accesses (blocks, attributes, plines, vertices, seqends, symbol tables), updating and extracting.
- File management, file naming schemes, project directory schemes, partition schemes, effective XREFing, drawing management utilities.

Some popular LUG activities

- **Power users:** Have gurus discuss uses of basic AutoCAD commands and system variables in ways that were never intended—but which work!
- **Work gallery:** Give members a chance to show off and discuss their work, methodologies, automations, project times, and equipment used.
- **Trick the panel:** Press the gurus with tough questions and see what they come up with.
- **“The Doctor is In”:** Invite a doctor or workplace ergonomics expert to discuss how to prevent work-related injuries such as eye strain and carpal tunnel syndrome and how to reduce on-the-job stress.
- **Annual artwork contest:** Hold a contest to create or modify the group’s logo and publish the winning entry in your newsletter throughout the next year.

Ongoing Recruitment

You want members to keep coming back for more and to bring new members with them.

It isn't enough to have great content and benefits for your members—you also have to get the word out that you exist! People come and go—new users move to town, long-time users leave.

Somehow your group has to keep track of this migration, and this section provides a number of ways to do this.

Getting current members to stay

- Make sure each meeting offers something of value to everyone It's OK to be specific sometimes, but cover general subjects, too.
- Offer attendees a chance to talk about themselves—their work, problems, interests, concerns.
- Participation is a great way to keep people coming back as it offers members a chance to share their knowledge and, in turn, learn.
- Avoid “responsibility burnout.” Rotate duties and try to get everyone into a leadership role. Spread the work among many volunteers.
- Stay current. Make sure the latest products, problems, and user issues are being addressed so that everyone can stay up-to- date. Providing the latest information and exposure to rare technologies is a great way to keep even the gurus in the group entertained. Give them opportunities to respond.
- Be sure to thank those who attend and let them know their attendance is appreciated. It takes little effort to let people know they matter, yet it goes a long way toward keeping members coming back.

Recruiting new members

- Go through your client list at work (if permission is granted). Ask those you contact to go through their client lists (if possible) and spread the word. Mention the group whenever you speak with a colleague.
- Go to the local university, college, tech institute, or Autodesk Training Center (ATC) and introduce the idea of a LUG to students. Ask the faculty if they would be willing to participate and/or encourage their students to become members at student rates. Find out if LUG meetings can be held at their facility.

- Go to your local Autodesk resellers, drafting services, and computer outlets and ask if they are interested in sponsoring your group by paying for an ad in your LUG newsletter, offering a location for meetings, or giving presentations. Many businesses are willing to offer discounts to members of a LUG and will encourage clients to take any literature you leave with them.
- If you have internet access, leave messages for folks in your area on local websites and blogs explaining your group's purpose.
- If you attend product-related conferences and seminars, ask if time can be allocated for you to present yourself and your group to the attendees.
- Some User Groups set up a booth at conferences.
- Mail out flyers using local business lists. In many cities, the Chamber of Commerce will have lists you can purchase and then use for mass-mailings or fax broadcastings to introduce your group.
- You can sometimes advertise for free on the public access channel in your city, TV channel with a community events calendar, newspaper with a community events section, local computer magazine, or movie theatre with slide ads.
- Make members proud to be involved. Word of mouth is the best kind of publicity and if the group is dynamic, members will talk.
- Create User Group business cards for members to hand out whenever they feel it's appropriate.
- Ask local computer businesses to display your group's logo in the window so that members and non-members alike will know this business is involved with the Autodesk software end-user community.
- Leave extra LUG newsletters at all local authorized Autodesk resellers.
- Send LUG meeting information to all local computer and national CAD/design publications
- Find out what trade shows and/or conferences Autodesk and AUGI will be participating in and see if they will distribute brochures or flyers about your user group.

Remember, a membership can't maintain itself. People move or change jobs or priorities, and without a proactive effort to bring in new members, the LUG will likely diminish.

Because constant reminding at LUG meetings can be numbing after a few months, we suggest that you save recruitment efforts for certain times of the year. Your members will have more energy to focus on recruiting, and when the drive is over, everyone can relax.

Other Ways to Build Your User Group

AUGI's Flagship Magazine

AUGIWorld is AUGI's premier electronic magazine geared specifically to Autodesk product users.

Its benefits are two-fold:

- If you would like a magazine filled with Autodesk technical articles to send to your members, *AUGIWorld* is the answer.
- If you already have a newsletter and want to supplement your communication efforts, *AUGIWorld* provides a variety of articles that you can add to your own newsletter.

(Always contact the editorial team at AUGI if you see a relevant article you may want to use to make sure you are allowed to use it)!

To find out more about this resource, visit the AUGI website at <http://www.augi.com>.

Newsletters

By far, localized technical publications are the most popular means of communication.

They not only give members a forum to discuss schedules, events, and resources within the group, but they also create a vehicle for obtaining recognition from local businesses.

Some LUG's publish and mail their newsletters. Others distribute via RSS or email to avoid printing and postage costs.

To create your newsletter, you can use a publishing program, a simple word processor, or even AutoCAD (yes, some groups actually PLOT their newsletter).

Start simple and concentrate mainly on content. A gorgeous newsletter full of fluff will get tossed aside.

Here are some ideas for information you can include in your newsletter:

Consider adding Autodesk University (AU) content - "AU Session of the Week/Month" might be a good start.

- Calendar and location of upcoming meetings; a map to the facility.
- Meeting agenda.
- The list of officers, their responsibilities, and contact information.
- Technical information pertinent to the product of focus.
- Tips and tricks.
- AUGI news and information.
- Industry event calendar.
- Reviews of products, books, and utilities.
- Web information.
- Source code for AutoLISP, MAXScript, or other utilities.
- Artwork or work files representative of the group.
- Advertisements from local businesses.
- Jokes and comics.

Note: Newsletters are a lot of work, so it's important to avoid overworking your editor or webmaster.

Some final notes on newsletters

- **Get help**

It is much easier to generate a newsletter if others pitch in on the various duties, such as applying labels and stamps, proofreading articles, or developing graphics. Ask officers to write articles and solicit articles from local businesses. Encourage members to submit drawings for graphic fillers.

- **Use advertisements to your advantage**

Use business cards for cheap advertisement layouts, and keep all sponsors' space equal (or charge more for bigger ads).

Don't turn your newsletter into a sales catalog—***keep advertising to 25 percent or less of the total material.***

Investigate bulk mail rates in your area. See if any local printing companies are willing to publish for reduced rates in turn for advertising.

- **Give people recognition**

Every newsletter should include the name of the officers, editor, and newsletter staff.

- **Provide sufficient funds to produce the newsletter**

You can be completely environmentally friendly nowadays - maybe consider an online newsletter? There are ways and means of doing this for free and it encourages members to provide their email details, plus sharing content between members is so much easier!

There are a great number of ways of creating online newsletter content:

- Blogging : WordPress, TypePad, Blogger
 - Email marketing solutions : Constant Contact, AWeber
 - Website : Look in to a low-cost Internet Service Provider (ISP) to host content
- Make a social occasion out of the final compilation process With several members working together, even a large newsletter can get finished in a couple of hours (snacks make great bribes, too). Usually when members get together to compile a newsletter, conversation kicks in and people learn—it's almost like a mini- meeting.

The Internet

The Internet offers a variety of ways for LUG members to keep networking throughout the year.

- **Email roundtables**

If your members have access to email, it is possible to set up a roundtable discussion, even if they don't have access to the Internet, newsgroups, or mail lists.

A roundtable is simply a means of copying everyone on a list with each posting. If anyone on the list posts at all, it goes out to everyone, giving each person an opportunity to respond (the response also goes out to everyone).

This is an elegant, simple means of having multi-user discussions regardless of firewalls and office rules about Web access.



- **Website**

Many LUG's have their own websites. These can be used as a substitute or a complementary resource to the group's newsletter. It's also a great way for other users in the area to locate your LUG.

Make sure to list your group on the popular search engine sites.

- **Facebook**

Set up a Facebook page or group (NOT a personal profile) for your LUG. Make sure to add all the necessary contact details, where you meet, times of meetings and who to contact for meeting details. Make sure to add photos of meetings and tag the LUG members to make them feel like they belong!

- **Twitter**

Set up a Twitter profile for your LUG. Make sure to add all the necessary contact details, where you meet, times of meetings and who to contact for meeting details. get your LUG members to "tweet" meeting details out on their Twitter profiles to encourage more membership and get the word out in the Twittersphere!

- **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is a great social tool aiming specifically at business (a Facebook for business, perhaps?). It is also a superb tool for connecting people and communities. Set up a group on LinkedIn for your LUG and send out invites for your members to join. Again, the members can promote the group, encouraging membership and spreading the word out there on the Internet.

There are many other social networking tools and apps out there, not just the ones mentioned above but make sure you use tried and tested ones that you know have a good record of being used. For example, everyone has heard of Facebook. Be careful not to spread yourself too thinly too. It is better to utilize a couple of well-known platforms rather than ten not-so-well-known ones.

As with everything Internet-related, please also ensure that if you are to use anyone's personal details, such as email, you make sure you are conforming to any relevant data protection legislation.

Autodesk University, trade shows, and special events

Each year, users worldwide meet at Autodesk University to learn how to use Autodesk products more effectively.

Some of the finest instructors teach at this event and address topics from simple Autodesk product features to highly sophisticated programming interfaces in the Autodesk products.

Local User Groups can participate by holding a User Group meeting at the event.

AUGI and Autodesk support User Groups at many regional conferences, but Autodesk University is the main conference on productivity. Please contact AUGI if you wish to find out how you can be a part of this annual event or other AUGI events.

Community involvement and resources

It would be hard to say enough about the benefits of having your group work with the local professional community.

From giving your group publicity to providing a meeting facility, local businesses often go to great lengths to sponsor user groups because they know that they, too, will benefit from them.

Maintaining a Membership Database

Probably the most valuable piece of information about any User Group is its membership database. Even though gathering membership information may not be a complicated process, there are a number of issues you should address as you build this golden resource:

- Should the database be made public or private? Some members may not want their information divulged to mail houses, local businesses, competing companies, or even other members. It's a professional courtesy to ask members about this and to honor their requests.
- In what format should the database be kept? If you're using a database program that requires specific software no one else can use, this might make it difficult for others to work on or maintain the database. Use a universal format.
- How should the database be organized? Use a structure that is flexible and easy to query. Avoid working with sophisticated database tools such a relational operators. Keep it simple.
- If the membership agrees to publicize the database, you can post it on your website, in your newsletter, or in a group directory. When publicizing the database, make sure it contains helpful information such as each member's interests, specialties, and type of work.
- Keep the database up-to-date. Many User Groups rely on the treasurer (or secretary) to maintain the database so that dues can be collected and tracked.
- Last but not least, use the database to your advantage. Query it to determine meeting topics, use it to print mailing labels or develop email or fax broadcasting address books. Take it with you to events and gatherings so that the information is readily available if you need it. Provide it to the membership if members agree.

User Group Roundtable

This section was compiled from a number of responses over the years from officers of Local User Groups. Each question and answer addresses real issues and concerns about managing a LUG.

Although AUGI and Autodesk do not necessarily endorse the feedback provided by each response, we trust you'll at least see the practicality of each viewpoint.

Comment 1:

"You never know who you've really elected with these types of groups until it's too late. We had a guy who was entertaining, sounded like he had the vision and motivation to keep our group going. But once he was elected, not only did he not show up very often, but when he did, he'd use the meeting as an opportunity to talk about his business. I'm just the treasurer of the group. How does a LUG go about impeaching a problem officer?"

Response 1:

"First, no officer on the board is more important than any other. Make this clear from the group's inception, and maybe put it in your bylaws.

Second, there should be a screening process for all officers. If any officer does not fulfil the assigned duties, the remaining board members should be allowed to remove this person from office. It's not an easy thing to do, but if a procedure is outlined in the bylaws and newly elected officers are reminded of the responsibilities and scrutiny by their peers, should this day arrive, it will be easier to implement.

You might also want to have elections based on more than a single presentation. Have some pre-qualifications on a form, have the existing officers review the candidates, review how much time and effort is expected, ask them if they understand the group's philosophies, goals, and taboos. Make it clear what you will not tolerate for the safety and integrity of your group."

Comment 2: "I'm the president of our group and I've never had a problem getting members to sign up as officers. But it seems like I'm always nagging the other officers to do what they're supposed to do before deadlines expire. And when I call and remind people of our deadlines, they get aggravated. Any suggestions?"

Response 2: "Welcome to politics. I know how you feel, and it isn't fair, but there's a certain amount of nagging that has to be done. I realized when I took office as president that I was putting myself in charge of making sure everyone did his or her assigned tasks.

Here are some things I do.

- Delegate the responsibility of keeping others on schedule.
- Send faxes or emails instead of calling so that they don't have to confront me directly if they're bothered by me.
- Let my fellow officers know ahead of time that I will be bugging them until things gets finished and that I expect a report at the meeting for the benefit of our members.
- Make sure completions of assigned tasks are announced to the members at the beginning of each meeting."

Comment 3: "There's another Autodesk software User Group only 10 miles away from ours. We get along fine with their officers, but when we call new members in our area, we find that most of them have already been contacted by the other group, even though we are much closer. How do we keep the other group from competing with us for members and local resources?"

Response 3: "Sounds like you need better marketing! I would study the competition and see what they're *not* doing. If the other group is doing the same thing you are, you might think about collaborating. Or focus your group's energy on what isn't being covered. I know one User Group that had a similar situation with a CAD group. They decided to focus on architectural uses of CAD and wound up getting unbelievable membership from the AIA.

Examine third-party software, hardware, and other disciplines, and don't play the same game. If no one else does what you do or offers what you offer, who cares what the neighbors are up to?"

Comment 4: "Is there any information about the new software releases from Autodesk that we can show to our members? We are an *Autodesk* LUG, after all. How are we supposed to help our users when we haven't even seen the products?"

Response 4: "Seeing new software is nice, but it doesn't always benefit everyone. Your meetings should concentrate on the software your members are currently using. Most of the folks in my group don't have purchasing power anyway, but they come to make their work easier.

If you can get a dealer to demo new stuff once in a while, or if you can get some evaluation software from Autodesk and give a presentation on it, great.

But I've found that members will appreciate your group much more if you give them something immediate, something they can experiment with using what they have at their offices. Save the dog-and-pony shows for seminars and annual events."

Comment 5: "I don't see the benefit of a Local User Group. I ran one for two years and all it turned out to be was a bunch of people who wanted free AutoCAD training. They didn't pay any dues; they didn't give presentations — they just expected me and a few others to teach them stuff every month. I feel that User Groups devalue good training centers."

Response 5: "Maybe what you don't see is the benefit of *your* Local User Group. There are far more reasons to join a LUG than just education.

Your LUG doesn't have to compete with outside training centers. In fact, you can use them as a huge resource by bringing their faculty in and letting them show off their knowledge. Then put in a short note explaining that if anyone wants further information on the topic, they can contact the training center.

Teaching users the value of education is as important as the class content!

Maybe your group can make this type of education its priority and expose them (if nothing else) to the training available in your area."

Section 5: AUGI Support

Although AUGI is a worldwide user group and works hard to keep its members globally connected, we also believe in the importance of users supporting each other *locally*. To help facilitate the growth of these Local User Groups, AUGI offers its assistance in a variety of ways.

What is AUGI?

AUGI is **Autodesk User Group International**, an organization that represents worldwide users of Autodesk products. Its primary goals are to teach members how to maximize their use of Autodesk software and to encourage and collect their feedback so that Autodesk can improve its products to better suit the users' needs.

Formerly known as NAAUG (North American Autodesk User Group), its focus was primarily on users in North America.

But at the 1996 annual meeting at Autodesk University, the Board of Directors and members discussed changes in the bylaws that would transform the group into a worldwide organization, realign the Board of Directors to better match the Autodesk market groups, and allow members to vote via the AUGI website or email.

These changes were voted in, establishing a new global charter with two main goals.

- To reach more users worldwide so they can share interests and ideas.
- To present a unified, industry-focused voice to Autodesk.

AUGI is led by a Board of Directors. The Board guides the various programs geared for the benefit of the members.

AUGI also relies on a large group of volunteers to help manage and work on AUGI programs. Volunteers work together in teams to serve the AUGI community.

Whether a member of the Board of Directors, an AUGI volunteer, or an individual member of AUGI, all support the organization with the aim of exchanging information concerning the use of Autodesk products and related software.

The AUGI President and Board work closely with Autodesk Corporate to address general issues pertinent to all users.

The AUGI/Autodesk Connection

Autodesk encourages AUGI's recommendations for future product development (primarily via the AUGI Wish Lists) and customer relations. In addition, AUGI represents a point of contact for worldwide user feedback for each Autodesk market group, providing information that helps Autodesk design software that enhances productivity.

AUGI Wish Lists

Autodesk has granted AUGI full responsibility for collecting, validating, prioritizing, and presenting all AUGI member wishes. The process is simple.

First, AUGI members should visit the Forums at <http://www.augi.com>, where they will find the Wish Lists located on the AUGI website.

AUGI members can view and vote on existing wishes and/or add a new wish to any Wish List.

AUGI provides these customer requests to the Autodesk product development teams in a timeline that is in sync with their development cycles.

So, the next time your LUG wants to make a wish, you know what to do.

Also, if you do get the opportunity to Autodesk University (AU), you will see the AUGI Board present Autodesk with the Wish List you helped to create!

May all your wishes continue to come true and you get the Autodesk product you wish for!

How AUGI Supports Its Members

As an AUGI member, your benefits include the following.

The AUGI website (<http://www.augi.com>), which offers a variety of resources:

- Web-based peer-to-peer support.
- Access to an annual salary survey.
- Online AUGI Training provision (AUGI Official Training Partners).
- Course archives from Autodesk University (AU).

- **A members' magazine**

As a member, you'll have access to **AUGIWorld**, a magazine filled with timely technical information, tips and tricks, career-boosting articles, Autodesk product news, and much more.

- **A monthly newsletter**

As a member, you'll also have the opportunity to receive the monthly **AUGI HotNews** in your email inbox. **HotNews** contains helpful articles, tips and tricks, and special announcements.

- **AUGI Member Registration**

It's easy to become an AUGI member— go to <http://www.augi.com> and register online.

There are **THREE** membership levels:

Basic Membership (FREE)

Formerly the free, standard AUGI membership, it is now the broadest level. The Forums (your main resource for finding and sharing technical tips) will remain free and open to everyone in the Autodesk world. Posting will continue to require membership at some level, but read access is open to the entire world without login or restriction.

Premier Membership (\$ fee applies)

Premier membership is the first level of the new paid membership tiers. Premier members will have access to all the Basic level benefits plus expanded site archives and early access to some publication features. This level is really designed for users who may still use older products and want access to historic AUGI content.

Professional Membership (\$ fee applies)

Professional membership is the new top level. It provides access to Basic and premier level features, plus AUGIWorld magazine in print delivered to your home or work address. AUGIWorld returned as a monthly print publication in 2012, and now members can receive that benefit when they join as a Professional.

During 2013, Professional members will also have the opportunity to apply for a free Standard Autodesk Developer Network (ADN) Membership.

In the future, AUGI will also be introducing greater access to content archives and special features only for Professional members.

Please refer to the membership page on the AUGI website for further details of the new tiered membership structure and the associated fees involved :

<https://www.augi.com/audi-membership-upgrade-information>

How AUGI Supports User Groups

AUGI knows the benefits of local User Groups and wants to do what it can to help establish, support, and sustain LUG's worldwide.

In addition to producing this handbook, the following are some other ways AUGI can support your LUG:

- Presidents of the LUG have direct access to an AUGI Director to assist with advice on how to run a better meeting.
- Access to a dynamic website.

To access this valuable information, visit the AUGI website at <http://www.augi.com>.

- **AUGIWorld magazine**

The AUGI flagship magazine is filled with technical articles, tips and tricks, and other useful Autodesk product information. This monthly magazine can be used to supplement current LUG membership communications, by providing topical content and news. Perhaps consider using one of the articles as a discussion point at one of your meetings? Also, consider recommending to your LUG members that Professional members of AUGI get AUGIWorld in print format, which may be beneficial for use at their workplace.

- **Website resources**

AUGI will provide a place on <http://www.augi.com> to list your group's key information as well as supply a link to your User Group's website.

- **User Group registration**

By registering your group, your group can reap all of the benefits AUGI has to offer.

Visit <http://www.augi.com> and click on **User Groups** in the menu bar.

The Differences between AUGI and User Groups

The main difference between AUGI and Local User Groups is that AUGI connects with and serves individual users around the world, while Local User Groups and UGA's bring users together in a specific area, allowing members to meet regularly face-to-face and address issues of regional importance.

AUGI does not replace the function and benefits of a Local User Groups, but instead complements the LUG by providing a global arena in which to network, exchange product knowledge and ideas, and give feedback to Autodesk.

In order for User Groups to achieve AUGI benefits, all users of the LUG are encouraged to join AUGI in addition to their Local User Group. Users who choose not to join AUGI will not receive the benefits of being an AUGI member.

We hope you have found the guidelines in this Handbook helpful. Our goal is helping your Local User Group and your User Group Associations succeed.

With careful planning, choosing a team of like-minded individuals to help get the group started, and reliance on local businesses to lend support, you can successfully form, build, and maintain a robust Local User Group.

Good luck!

Shaun Bryant
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Board of Directors, AUGI
UGA/UG Director
(April 2013)



AUGI Key Contacts

Following is the contact list for AUGI officers and the 2013 AUGI Board of Directors. They welcome your ideas and questions, so feel free to email them.



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