

What is an Interest Group?

An OLLI at UNL Interest Group is a collection of members who share a common interest and wish to interact on their mutual interest as active, rather than as passive, learners. Meeting regularly, *Interest Groups* provide new and enriching opportunities to form friendships with other members. Each group is different depending on its focus.

The origin of Interest Groups is not critical, and their focus can be as diverse as one's imagination. They may stem from any source. And they can be created for a wide array of purposes: as a follow up to classes, attached to a class as a kind of discussion session, as a sunset group that comes together for a relatively short term on a focused topic, and, most commonly, as a continuing group focused on a general topic. All of these variations have been used with good success.

Interest Group leaders are encouraged to utilize principles of Servant Leadership (1). Interest Group members decide when and where they will meet and how the group will function. Meetings may include fixed programs or speakers, but sharing of knowledge, experiences or perspectives by the members enhances the learning experience. Members with curiosity, but little knowledge or experience in the subject are always welcome.

Initially, OLLI members volunteer to be the leader or co-leaders of a new *Interest Group*. They handle administrative issues and communications with the OLLI office and announcements to group members. Interest groups depend on volunteers and leadership roles may rotate among the group members. Active participation is necessary to get the most out of an interest group, members may need to read or browse topics before the group meetings.

Existing OLLI Interest Groups are listed in the OLLI Course Catalogs and the OLLI website.

Can I Start an *Interest Group*?

Yes! OLLI's *Interest Groups* foster learning and friendships by linking OLLI at UNL members who share a common interest (reading books, ping-pong players, meditation, politics, sketching, walking, woodworking, science & technology, etc.). *Interest Groups* do not take the place of OLLI courses and programs – they complement them! Like everything else at OLLI at UNL, all it takes is a member willing to take the lead and find others who share the same interest. The contact people at the Membership Committee can provide limited help and also advice with your efforts.

¹ **Servant leadership** is both a leadership philosophy and set of leadership practices. Traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the “top of the pyramid.” By comparison, the servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. Servant leadership turns the power pyramid upside down; instead of the people working to serve the leader, the leader exists to serve the people. When leaders shift their mindset and serve first, they unlock purpose and ingenuity in those around them, resulting in higher performance and engaged, fulfilled employees. A servant leader's purpose should be to inspire and equip the people they influence.