



Lessons from compiling a Directory of community food initiatives

A briefing paper from the Scottish Community Diet Project

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The 2004 Directory of Community Food Initiatives has provided a snap shot of ongoing food initiatives in Scotland, giving a sample of work currently being undertaken by community groups in Scotland. However, the directory does not claim to provide an exhaustive list, but merely a snap shot of the range of community food initiatives which are willing to network and share ideas and information.

This briefing paper is intended to give guidance to anyone who is considering compiling a similar directory on either a national, regional or local scale.

Decide what you want from the Directory

Before you can start collecting information for a directory, you must first decide what information you want to include, and also what type of groups you want to include. Obviously, you will want to provide some contact details for each group, but you have to decide what level of detail is required.

?? **Group Name – e.g. Brigadoon Horticultural Society**

You may also wish to ask for alternative group names, as some groups may have changed name, or are associated with other project names.

?? **Contact Name – e.g. Robert Burns, Secretary**

Each group must decide who the best contact person, whether they are full time or part time, a volunteer or paid a member of staff.

?? **Contact Address – e.g. 20 Hill Street, Brigadoon**

Some smaller groups may be apprehensive about providing this information, especially if the only available contact address is someone's home. An alternative contact address (such as a community centre or a PO Box) may be required.

?? **Phone Number – e.g. 01210 123456**

Again, some groups may be apprehensive about providing their home phone numbers.

?? **Email address – e.g. Robert@brigadoonhs.org.uk**

Email addresses are useful, but some community groups do not have access to a computer, and email addresses can be unreliable and changeable.

These are the main contact details, but some groups may wish to provide more details, such as web addresses or fax numbers. You should be prepared to accommodate any additional information.

As well as contact details, you will need to collect descriptive data about what the groups are and what they do. For instance, the following gives some ideas of how you may want to structure this information:

?? **Target Groups – e.g. Brigadoon Horticultural Society is open to all residents of Brigadoon and the surrounding areas, who share an interest in gardening.**

- ?? **Activities** – e.g. We organise an annual flower show and regular workshops on gardening for our members.
- ?? **Achievements** – e.g. Helped the town attain a national gardening award in 2003.
- ?? **Funding** – e.g. Is funded by members annual subscriptions, with some financial assistance from the Local Authority.

However, you need to strike a balance between getting enough information to make the directory useful, and asking for too much information which will discourage people from participating. For instance, funding information can be quite sensitive.

As well as deciding what information you want to collect, you must also decide how you are going to distribute this information, and there are several options, each with their own advantages and disadvantages:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Paper Publication	Accessible to individuals without computer access or computer skills	Less easy to search by different criteria
	No need to keep updated after publication, until next edition	Can quickly become dated
	No running costs	Relatively high publication costs per unit
On Line Database	Fully searchable, and distribution easy to those with internet access	Only accessible to those with computer access and computer skills
	Can be easily updated	Once published online, needs to be constantly updated to stay useful, and to allow groups to withdraw their entries
	Low publication costs but good understanding of technical requirements beneficial	Requires considerable technical knowledge to set up, and running costs of maintaining a website
CD Rom Database	Fully searchable	Only accessible to those with computer access and computer skills
	Low Publication costs per unit, and no running costs	Requires considerable technical knowledge to set up.
	No need to keep updated after publication, until next edition	Can quickly become dated

Collecting the data

Once you have decided what information you want to collect, and prepared a form, it is now time to collect the data.

- ?? Use the different networks that link community groups, such as local authorities, NHS health promotion/community workers, community centres, churches and town halls.
 - ?? Publicise the fact that you are compiling a directory, by posting announcements in the local press, community newsletters and at relevant events.
 - ?? We received only a limited response (e.g. less than 5%) from simply mailing out forms with covering letters. In order to get a more comprehensive response you will need to talk to potential entrants (often more than once), pointing out the benefits of becoming part of the directory (e.g. raising the group's profile, allowing networking with other groups). A project worker's time is precious, and filling in the directory form may not seem like a high priority to them, so be persistent and remind them of the benefits.
 - ?? Showing potential entrants the list of groups who have already enlisted in the directory is a good way of motivating them to take part.
 - ?? Also consider listing support groups (whether national or regional) for community initiatives in a separate section of the directory. For instance, you could list the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, or the Scottish Community Diet Project, both of whom can provide support to local initiatives.
 - ?? **Important:** Not only are you collecting information about the groups, you are also gathering their permission to have these details published, in order to comply with the **Data Protection Act**. Make sure this is made clear on the form and include a signature box with this section. Retain all forms after publication. For more information on data protection please visit www.dataprotection.gov.uk
 - ?? You will have to set a deadline for forms to be returned by. You may wish to set an initial deadline and extend it if you feel initiatives need a little extra time.
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And finally...

You need to decide when the data collection is complete. You then move to publishing and distributing the information. It is a good idea to move to this stage as soon as possible, as the information will quickly become dated.

It is worthwhile having someone check over the publication before it is produced. Ideally this should be a professional proof reader, but could also be someone with knowledge of the geographic area or community sector, but without prior involvement in your directory.

Once you have the finished publication you might want to ensure all those groups which participated receive a copy. You can also use the local press, community and voluntary sector newsletters and relevant events to publicise its existence. This publicity will encourage more groups to participate if another edition of the directory is compiled.