

# How to get your group listed in a community directory



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## 1. Introduction

This guide explains what community directories are, why they matter and how to get your group or civic organisation listed in them. To sharpen the focus, the example of a Christian church is used, but any group could apply the principles to their own context.

This guide is being written in the United Kingdom, but international references appear in the text from time to time. A fuller explanation of the approach taken to creating this guide can be found at [How-to-write-in-public.pdf \(peterbates.org.uk\)](https://peterbates.org.uk/How-to-write-in-public.pdf). It is part of a suite of linked documents made up of the following:

1. [Detecting dark matter](#) demonstrates that a brief internet search will not locate many community resources and therefore mapmakers need to employ other search techniques
2. [Introduction to community maps and directories](#) sets out some concepts and explains what people might be doing when they use these terms.
3. [How to meet your statutory obligations in community mapping](#) brings together the various legal requirements and policy guidance laid upon public services in the United Kingdom.
4. [How to choose between a community or service directory](#) unpacks the arguments for each option and attempts to show that a community directory is a vital element of local life.
5. [How to measure the reach of community directories](#) suggests some key performance indicators for checking whether a directory reflects the community it serves and provides some data about what is currently available.

6. [How to decide what to put in your map of community assets](#) addresses the specifics of how to obtain the data that will form the content of your Directory or map, what counts as data and what should be published.
7. [How to get your group listed](#) helps community groups decide whether to appear in a particular directory or map. This guide may also be useful to people who commission mapmakers.
8. [How to name your dragon](#) catalogues the threats to effective mapmaking in uncharted territory
9. [Goldmining – how to find hidden community treasure](#) offers some strategies which might be adopted by mapmakers in searching for community assets.
10. The [Directory of Directories](#) provides a starting point for people wishing to build a local community directory, while the [List of English SEND Local Offer websites](#) provides the evidence source for much of the content of these papers.

I am grateful to the many people<sup>1</sup> who have responded to inquiries and contributed ideas to this group of papers. Please send your suggestions for further improvements to [peter.bates96@gmail.com](mailto:peter.bates96@gmail.com).

## 2. What are community directories?

Community directories list buildings, community organisations, groups and events in your area. You can use them to find a plumber (a trades directory), live music (what's on), a care home (service directory), community garden, walking group, a church or a host of other things in your neighbourhood. If you already know the name and address of what you are looking for, you may well go straight to the website of the group, but a directory will list places you have never heard of and suggest entirely new options.

There are many community directories, and each area of the UK and each aspect of community life has its own pattern. They may be national or local, covering a niche topic or aiming to include everything, focused on young or disabled people or concentrating on festivals at the expense of the kitchen concert. They may be up to date or out of date, popular or rarely searched, loaded with local stuff or no more than a list of the headquarters of national bodies.

It is worth making a list of your local directories so that you can decide where to focus your effort. Find them online by using the following search terms:

- community directory
- what's on
- local offer
- [your interest] list
- Combine the above with equality terms such as disability or inclusion.

Find the directories that serve the next county and ask them to identify their peers in your area. Look out for merged areas. For example, when looking for details about Nottingham, one directory serves the Nottingham unitary authority area only, another includes both the city and county and a third covers both this county and the neighbouring county.

### 3. Who uses community directories?

Some directories may be checked by health and social care staff, such as social prescribers and others whose job is to point people to places where they can find friends, take exercise and locate an opportunity to contribute. Others may be popular with Black and minoritized communities, so getting listed could help to strengthen the diversity of your group.

There is an army of workers who want to signpost people. Check your values - is your church or community group a place where folks who might draw on health or social care services would be welcome?

### 4. Why bother getting listed?

Before embarking on the process of getting listed, work as a group to clarify your reasons for doing so. They may seem obvious to you, but appearing in a community directory should be just one small part of a larger project. If you want people to tour your historic building, attend your concert, give you money, join your group of regular members, or adopt your beliefs or campaign agenda, then each of these goals will shape the way in which you engage with community directories. Each of these reasons for getting listed might trigger wider debate and action. In one example, if you want to appear in the AccessAble Directory, your premises will be checked for wheelchair accessibility, so you may need to get on and have that ramp fitted before getting listed. In a second example, if some members of your group are unfriendly towards people who happen to be smelly, do not speak English or steal things, then this conversation about who is welcome could become ugly and welcomers will need to be brave and challenge such views.

Can you rely on directory managers to have included your organisation already? Some churches have existed as a community organisation for a thousand years and yet do not appear. This is partly because the directory managers are keen to obtain your consent before listing your group, partly because they simply do not know what is going on and partly because they do not have time to initiate contact with new places.

A survey of the directories run by 50 local authorities found fewer than one in five included 20 or more churches and this rarely amounted to more than 20% of the churches likely to be active in their neighbourhood. In July 2023, St Nic's Nottingham was running almost 30 events in a typical week and yet only one of them appeared in the ASKLiON directory; St Nic's is one of 168 active churches in the unitary authority area, of which only 31 appeared in ASKLiON. This means that care staff and ordinary citizens who use the directory are getting a distorted and incomplete picture of community life.

Present your case in your own terms, but then flip it so that you can explain it to the wider community. For example, a church may decide to get listed since: *"We are tasked with copying Jesus and his original followers. Rather than meeting in secret (John 20:19), everyone, including busy (Hab 2:2) and minoritised people (Jas 2:1), should be able to find us (Acts 2:46; 5:12; 19:9), invite themselves to our church events (Zech 8:23) and receive a welcome from us."* Then edit it into a submission that is comprehensible to outsiders!

## 5. Choose which of your activities to list

Some individuals and organisations do not want to be found, so refuges and safe houses should not appear, while persons who need to hide from ex-lovers, stalkers and the media need to be able to maintain their privacy. Other gatherings and events such as a family celebration or private party have a defined membership and are not open to the public.

Apart from these, you will probably want to include all your activities that are indeed open to the public and not just the things that look most like social services. Newcomers need a place to belong and contribute, not just a warm space and free groceries, and churches that invite people to join a worshipping community should be visible to inquirers.

If you think that the manager of your Community Directory doesn't want to include these things, ask what they consider to be legitimate content. In a local example, the directory manager wanted a fuller picture but thought that the church wasn't interested in submitting it, while the church thought that the directory wouldn't accept more than details of the warm space and breakfast club.

When deciding what to submit, some groups review what already appears in the directory and conform to the pattern they find there. If the only appearances are related to care homes, then they wrongly assume that this is all that is welcome and suppress all other information about their activities before making a submission. Again, if you are not clear what sort of information would be acceptable, ask the directory manager, rather than assume.

Directories will usually want to know the contact details for your group, where and when you meet, what happens and whether there are any eligibility requirements. You might want to help visitors by inviting enquiries, explaining how to use public transport and describing how newcomers are welcomed. For a broader discussion about which details to submit, see section 8 of *How to decide what to publish in your map of community assets*.

## 6. Select the best directories

Any group wishing to use one or more directories to advertise their presence will need to start by creating a list of the directories that are available in their locality and area of interest. Take the church of St Nic's, Nottingham as an example. It could appear in [A church near you](#), [Additional Needs Alliance](#), [ASKLiON](#), [Charity Commission](#), [Companies House](#), [Cylex](#), [Evangelical Alliance](#), [Euan's Guide](#), [Eventbrite](#), [Find a Church](#), [Inclusive church](#), [In your area](#), [It's in Nottingham](#), [Join my church](#), [LEFTLION](#), [Love Nottingham](#), [NG Network](#), [Nottingham CVS](#), [Open Street Map](#), [Self Help UK](#), [Southwell and Nottingham Church History Project](#), [The Way](#), [Visit Nottinghamshire](#), [Welcome Churches](#) and perhaps elsewhere.

The characteristics of your group will make you eligible for admission to only a subset of the available directories, but there are still too many to engage with them all, so you will have to make a choice to ignore some and focus on others.

Below are some questions to keep in mind when you are choosing which directories to enter and which to ignore. Few directories provide the answers to these questions on their webpages.

1. Do you want to engage with a specialist directory that is focused on your interest and nothing else, or would it be better to support a much larger project where your niche list can

be found by using really good search terms. Part of the answer will depend on the ability of a large directory to accurately filter and quickly find the material you need.

2. Is this directory the one your most influential local organisations recognise and fund? What staffing (paid and volunteer) is assigned to update records and market the directory to new audiences?
3. Is it clearly written and easy to understand and navigate?
4. Is there an easy way to get in touch with the directory manager which includes their name and enables you to retain a record of your message to them? Do they reply?
5. Do they charge a fee for listing your group? Do they require sign up or provide a venue and event booking service that you need?
6. How many people search this directory? What do the directory terms and conditions of use allow searchers to do with what they find? See more on this in 'Check the small print' below.
7. How many similar groups to your own are already listed? You may be eager to appear in a directory that has hitherto neglected your area of community life, or you may want to concentrate your efforts on directories that are already well patronised.
8. Are most of the entries local, or has the directory been filled up with national organisations and groups based outside your patch?
9. Do entries include a 'last updated' field, so you can see how old the information is?
10. Is there a steering group or coproduction group that draws in different sections of the community? Can ordinary citizens join it? Who does the broader strategic work of market shaping by bringing together the leaders of different directories and commissioning a coordinated response?
11. How long has this directory been running and how complete is it?
12. Does the directory have its future secured or might it close next year? Is there a legacy plan that ensures its contents are transferred rather than lost?

Check what information they ask for about your group, and particularly check whether or not you may include a description of what you do and stories of your impact in addition to your contact information.

Consider whether the values revealed by the directory align with yours. For example, if the directory is no more than a list of welfare services, it is implying that citizens should engage in community life to get their own needs met rather than to make a contribution. Such messages may be unintentional, but they are no less powerful. If a directory segregates young people from adults, it is hinting that intergenerational friendships should be viewed as risky rather than enriching to life. If a directory lists segregated provision and nothing else, it is giving out the unfortunate message that disabled or diverse people 'belong' in places away from mainstream community. If a What's On listing includes expensive concerts but misses low-cost gigs, it suggests that the cultural life of the community is the preserve of the wealthy.

## 7. Check the small print

Some community directories publish their 'terms and conditions of use. They may ban anyone from using the directory for any reason other than their own personal engagement in the community activities they find listed there. This means that anyone who is helping another person by finding information, discussing options, accompanying them to the group or supporting their participation is prohibited from using the directory. Similarly, group leaders who want to connect with the people running neighbouring groups are not supposed to use the data for this purpose, and nor are researchers and investigators who wish to survey community life, check accessibility, explore eco credentials or ask others about the potential for collaboration between their organisations. There are so many directories available that any which attempt to confine searches to such a narrow purpose can be safely abandoned and left to wither.

Other directories advise their readers to make a careful check of the quality of community organisations before engaging with them. Such advice is both proper and proportionate when applied to residential care or those who provide intimate care to people in their own homes. But directory writers overreach their role when they do not distinguish these settings from casual engagement with informal community groups and networks that engage people as ordinary citizens. Asking for sight of a DBS certificate or evidence of health and safety training attended by volunteer leaders prior to popping into the community café is disproportionate and it frustrates the human right of participation in society free of restrictive practices. Any directory that suggests such a thing should be challenged or left to shrink into a nothing more than a service directory.

Thirdly, the terms and conditions set out in some directories are freighted with dire warnings about liability in the event of something going wrong. The local authority, armed with legal advisors and expertise in bureaucracy, uses its terms and conditions statement to offload all responsibility for any accident or misadventure, neatly transferring the entire responsibility to the voluntary or informal group. Whether or not such declarations would stand up to legal scrutiny, they discourage small and informal groups from having anything at all to do with the directory concerned and reveal the true character of the local authority's vision of partnership. Elsewhere, one hopes that more enlightened authorities recognise the part they can play in supporting informal community endeavours and assisting them on the rare occasions that something goes wrong.

## 8. Communicate well

Here are a few real examples from churches to illustrate the need for clear communication in all directories:

- A webpage entitled 'Your Journey' described an inner, spiritual search for God, not bus routes and parking.
- In a wonderful example of a mixed metaphor, a church 'seeks to be a pivotal pillar'.
- Visitors to a homepage were told that they could expect 'an anointed time in the Word'.

Are you writing your directory submission for people who share your culture and jargon, or for newcomers? Get friends from outside to give you feedback on your draft description of your group and its activities.

One third of church websites are gravestones, pointing to a life that is over and a church that has closed, so how will the reader get the message that your directory entry is describing current realities? Strip out all out of date items and make it contemporary.

## 9. Stay on top of it

Get permission from the directory manager and provide a link to it on your website and Facebook page. Build a list of the directories where you appear and set your own date to review and update them, including the 'last checked' field, so directory readers know that the information is right.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of those who have been approached and responded to a request can be seen in *Introduction to community maps and directories* (op cit).