

How to Develop a Local Community Directory

Synopsis

Create a directory that lists the various businesses, organizations, and programs in your community that relate in some way to Transition.

Whether a printed booklet or a website, a directory will encourage people to support local businesses, buy local and sustainable products, and get involved in Transition efforts. It will also help your community see what economic resources it already has available for starting relocalization projects, as well as what resources it lacks. This information can also help lay the foundation for eventually developing an Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP).

Roles

Project Coordinator(s)

Convene and facilitate the project; ensure that all necessary tasks are being done

Outreach and Research

Inform business about the project, collect their information, and get them involved

Writers and Editors

Write, edit and refine the directory as needed

Designers

Design the layout and any graphics

Production and Distribution

Coordinate printing and distribution throughout the community

Promotion

Promote the directory

Time Frame

1 to 3 months

Tools

Telephone, computer, desktop publishing software

Project Outline

A useful directory is much more than just a list of business names and contact information:

- It includes succinct information about each listing,
- it categorizes listings into sensible topics,
- it has a design that makes it easy and pleasant to use,
- it is free, and widely available throughout the community, and
- ideally, it includes coupons, a community map, a calendar of local events, and anything else that will encourage people to use it.

The first step in developing your Local Community Directory is to form a working group and talk about your ideas and goals for the project.

Look at existing examples of local and/or sustainable directories, such as:

- Local First (www.localfirst.com) in West Michigan,
- SustainaBundy Guide (www.sustainabundy.org) in Bundaberg, Australia.

(see resources on page 3 for more examples)

Research what local business directories and organizations already exist.

Get a sense of the time and interest the members of your workgroup have for the project, and then follow the steps outlined in the next section (note though that you may choose to follow them in a slightly different sequence more adapted to your group).

Process

- 1. PREPARATION.** Create a Project Plan that establishes the basic outline of your project, including rough ideas for:
 - a. Finances (what resources do you have, what expenses will you incur, and what can you do to make the project pay for itself?)
 - b. Types of listings (businesses, non-profits, government agencies, etc.)
 - c. Criteria for listing (for example, must be majority locally-owned or operated, or must support strategies for building community resilience in some way, etc.).
 - d. Physical area the directory will cover (for example, one main street, one neighborhood, the whole town, etc.)
 - e. Medium of delivery (print or website).
 - f. Basic design, including the size, length, and name.
 - g. Content (will you include coupons, maps, a community calendar, advertisements, or other items?)
 - h. Production goals (how many will you print, and how often will you update and reprint?)
 - i. Distribution goals (where and how will you distribute them?)
 - j. Promotion goals (how will you promote the directory so people know it exists, and will want to use it?)
- 2. RESEARCH.** Based on your project plan, research the businesses, organizations and anything else you will list in your directory. The ideal way to do this is to contact each potential listing in person to collect names, location, phone number, website, and a brief description.

Visiting in person allows you to ensure that they meet your criteria for inclusion, as well as to tell the business or organization about the directory. It's also an opportunity to ask if they would like to advertise in the directory, offer coupons, or even host a rack for distribution.
- 3. DESIGN.** After you have all the information collected, it needs to be developed into a useable format and visually presented in a useful and attractive way. From an engaging cover to easy-to-use categorizations and index, the design of your directory could contribute to its success or failure more than its actual content. If your project group is lacking in graphic design skills, consider asking local designers to donate their services in exchange for advertising or sponsorship.
- 4. PRODUCTION.** If you are producing print copies, it can be as simple as a staple-bound booklet produced at a local photocopy shop, or as fancy as a glue-bound, color-cover directory produced by a professional printing firm. In either case, you should be able to get some if not all of the printing costs donated in exchange for advertising or sponsorship. Printers have specific requirements for product design and format, so be sure engage a printer early in your process.
- 5. DISTRIBUTION and PROMOTION.** Any business that you list in your directory will likely be happy to have a stack available for customers. You can also set up a table at local events to give away copies. When your directories is printed and distributed to place where people can get them, contact your local media to announce its premiere. The businesses and organizations listed in the directory are the ones who benefit the most from it, so encourage them to promote it and to get involved in its revisions, reprintings and further development.

Resources

- ReDirect Guide in Portland/Vancouver, OR, Denver/Boulder/Fort Collins, CO and Greater Salt Lake & Park City, UT
www.redirectguide.com
- Business Alliance for Local Living Economies
www.livingeconomies.org (BALLE)
- Hometown Advantage (New Rules Project)
www.newrules.org/retail
- Local First in West Michigan
www.localfirst.com
- SustainaBundy Guide in Bundaberg, Australia
www.sustainabundy.org
- Whole Islands Catalogue in the San Juan Islands, WA
www.wholeislandscatalog.net
- Rocky Mountain Growers Directory in Colorado
www.localsustainability.net/?page_id=3

TRANSITION UNITED STATES

www.transitionus.org

Tackling Climate Change and Peak Oil. Bringing the Head, Heart and Hands of Communities together to make the transition to life beyond oil.

Transition United States is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to catalyze, inspire, encourage, network, support and train communities throughout the U.S. as they consider, adopt, adapt and implement Transition Initiatives.

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