

Defining Your Community

Why Define Your Community?

Defining your community is an important first step in planning and organising community action. Being able to define and describe the key characteristics of your community will allow you to understand the dynamics of your community, and to track changes over time.

There are two main factors to consider:

Firstly, you have to consider geography. How would you describe your community within the natural landscape? How spread out or compact are your community members from each other or from the village/town centre? How do transport and accessibility affect community members?

Secondly, consider household demographics. What is the population like in the households within your community? Consider age structure, poverty/income, employment status, main employment categories or educational attainment. There are resources out there which can help you gather data on your community in terms of various demographics factors.

Gathering Data on Your Local Area

Gathering data can assist in defining your community and also provide a robust overview of the population, geography, economy culture and heritage of your local area. There are a range of sources from which data can be gathered, however some may only be available at either Constituency or Local Authority area depending on the source. This can still assist you to build an overview of the local context whilst more localised information can provide further detail.

Local and Community Sources

Knowledge and expertise within the community can assist in providing useful information such as Geography, Environment and Natural Heritage, Culture, History, Community Activity, etc. Identifying key contacts with expertise can assist in drawing this information together and can also build a wider sense of ownership of defining the community.

Identifying individuals or local groups (e.g. local heritage society) that can assist in providing information on the local area. An clear outline of the information and geographic context you aim to include should be provided but it is also worth asking if there is any further information that would help in outlining the key characteristics.

Public Service Data

Public agencies gather and collate data from a range of sources, much of which is available online. Different sources have different approaches to searching and extracting localised data which can be time consuming, however this can provide a rich source of information to assist in providing the local context.

Census Data

Scotland's Census is the official count of every person and household in the country, normally gathered every 10 years. The Census Scotland Website provides an overview as well as case studies of how census data has been used. You can search by location which can assist in developing an outline of your community, either by postcode or local authority area.

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a relative measure of deprivation across 6,976 small areas (called data zones). If an area is identified as 'deprived', this can relate to people having a low income but it can also mean fewer resources or opportunities. SIMD looks at the extent to which an area is deprived across seven domains: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing.

Data zones in rural areas tend to cover a large land area and reflect a more mixed picture of people experiencing different levels of deprivation. This means that SIMD is less helpful at identifying the smaller pockets of deprivation found in more rural areas, compared to the larger pockets found in urban areas. SIMD domain indicators can still be useful in rural areas if analysed separately from urban data zones or combined with other data. It is possible to search and extract information in relation to data zones and postcode.

Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics

Statistics.scot.gov provides a range of statistical and geographic data about Scotland from a variety of organisations. There is the opportunity to find, share, use and download data from over 250 datasets. Information can be drilled down to Local Authority or Local Authority Constituency, which may still be too broad for remote and rural locations. Start browsing by theme, organisation, or geography.

Examples of themes include Community Wellbeing and Social Environment, with information such as community safety, community land owned, income and poverty.

Organisations would include Public Health Scotland (for health data), Transport Scotland (travel and transport data), Nature Scotland (natural heritage information) and Visit Scotland (tourism and visitor numbers).

Geography allows info to be drilled down to Post Code or Data Zone which can be useful in rural context where Local Authority Constituency may be too broad a view, however not all data is available in searches of a very localised nature, so there may be a need to take wider geographic data as well as more localised to present an overview of your locality.

An example of an area drilled down to Local Authority constituency would be:
statistics.gov.scot | South Kintyre

Local Government

Local Authorities would normally have information available on their website giving the geographic, economic, and demographic information for their area. Some of this information may be available on a more localised basis and there is usually a department or officer responsible for data that may be able to provide assistance for your data gathering.

Information to support demographic analysis such as school role's would also be available from the Local Authority Education Department.

NHS

Health and wellbeing statistics are available on a locality basis within each health board (e.g., NHS Highland, NHS Borders and also broken down into Health and Social Care Partnership Areas. This can provide useful information on Adult and Young People's health overview, but the smallest geography would be local authority. This can however provide an overview of health and wellbeing and there may be a local officer available to provide assistance in gathering data for your more localised area.

Public Health Scotland also provides statistical information and can be accessed via Office for National Statistics or directly from Public Health Scotland.

Maps, Photographs, and Illustrations

Maps, photographs, and pictures can assist in bringing information on your local community context to life and assist in presenting a clear overview.

Maps

Maps can provide a valuable visual aid to assist in defining your area. Many maps are available online and can be used if you credit the source. For Example Google Maps can be a useful tool for showing location in either map or satellite and Google allow usage in reports, presentations, on the web, in a print project. Open Street Map also provide online maps free to copy, distribute, transmit and adapt as long as you credit Open Street Map and its contributors.

These maps provide the option to add notes which can be useful in presenting. A general website search can provide a range of map images, however there may be copyright issues in reuse of some of these and you should always check, for example OS Maps require a licence to reproduce. Your local authority may also be able to provide planning area maps for a small fee.

Photographs

A picture paints a thousand words, or so it is said and this is particularly true in assisting to define your community. Photographs of your local area and community can assist in providing a better understanding of the geography, people, culture, and types of activities.

It is important to make sure you have permissions from any person clearly identifiable in a photograph both when taking photographs but especially when using within a document or website. Consent from a parent or guardian will be required for photographs of children or young people. An example of a photo general photo consent form is provided here.

Illustrations

Illustrations can also be an effective way of showing some of the character or defining features of your community. Identifying someone with artistic skills can be helpful and for example creating a map with key assets highlighted can be of value when defining your community. It may be possible to work with a local college, art club or school to ask for illustrations to be created.

Reaching out across the community more broadly can also provide an opportunity for engaging (for example to include children and young people) and activities such as a competition which asks for drawings of favourite place in the local area can be effective in generating illustrations.

(Competition rules should highlight that these may be reproduced in reports or online to support the work of the organisation). Selected illustrations can then be used to create engaging visuals for the area as well as highlighting local perspectives.

Case Studies

- [Ross of Mull and Iona Community Plan](#) *(written in English)*

A detailed overview of defined community is provided in the Ross of Mull & Iona written report, pages 4 - 8.

Provides an overview of population, physical infrastructure, business, employment and the economy, culture and heritage, community facilities and social infrastructure, with a detailed section on each element.

➤ [Glenbarr Community Investment Plan and Video](#) (*written in English*)

These resources give a good example of the defined community. Pages 1 - 2 of the plan provide a summary of defined community in terms of geography and population context (households, demographics, physical infrastructure, etc).

➤ [A Simple Test: to examine the main characteristics and needs of the community](#)
(*written in Finnish*)

- The purpose of the test is to help in finding out characteristics and needs of a rural community by answering on questions concerning the population, infrastructure, employment, services, free-time activities, sense of community, communication, pull factors and marketing of the community.
- By summing up the weight given to each answer, the test provides an overall description of the community.
- The results of the test can be further deliberated by filling in the [following manual for community planning](#).