

The voice of the Voluntary Arts

Finding a venue – some new ideas

Finding a suitable venue for your voluntary arts or crafts activity can be a challenge – whether it's for a one-off show or exhibition, a regular workshop or rehearsal, or a meeting space for your management committee. This briefing provides voluntary arts groups with a number of new ideas about who to approach when looking for new places to use.

A. New ideas for finding a venue

- **Empty Shops Network** – it's estimated that about 13 per cent of the UK's shops are sitting empty, and that one in five empty shops may never be used again. Members of the Empty Shops Network help new initiatives start on the high street, bringing visitors back to town centres and helping local communities turn private spaces into public places. To find out more and get guidance on how to transform an empty shop in your area, visit www.emptyshopsnetwork.com.
- **Café Rouge** – has made a commitment to provide free meeting spaces to informal learning groups, on the proviso that the users buy drinks at the café. This opportunity may suit planning/committee meetings as opposed to actual art/craft sessions, but have a chat with your local Café Rouge manager to see what is possible. To find contact details visit www.caferouge.co.uk.
- **Pub in the Hub** (England and Wales) – an initiative inspired by HRH Prince of Wales to encourage rural communities and pub landlords to work together to diversify business. As well as community group activities, shops, post offices, meeting spaces and small businesses have been developed in pubs involved in the project. To find your nearest participating pub, visit www.pubisthehub.org.uk.
- **Wetherspoons** – manages over 750 pubs throughout the UK, some of which have meeting spaces and can be set aside for group meetings. Contact your nearest Wetherspoons landlord to see if they can offer some space – contact details at www.jdwetherspoon.co.uk.
- **Churches, temples, mosques and synagogues** – and their related ancillary buildings, can provide a good source of venues for communities groups, whether or not those groups have any religious links or affiliations. Contact the person responsible for maintaining your local place of worship, and ask if they have a scheme for community access.
- **Other voluntary art or craft groups** – you may know lots of groups that do the same art or craft form as you from all over the country, but you may not know groups of other art or craft forms, even if they are in your local area. For example, if you're a choir, there might be a dance group right down the road from you with their own hall that they only use three nights a week – perhaps you could lease it from them when they're not using it? See also Briefing 127 – Working with groups of other art and craft forms, available to download from www.voluntaryarts.org/briefings).
- **Sports clubs** – as with the arts, many local sports clubs are run by volunteers as well as professionals, and many have venues that they own or lease from the local authority or from private landlords. By seeking out the sports clubs in your area you may be able to find a venue that is available for your group at particular times of the week on a shared tenancy, leased or sub-leased basis.

B. Listings and directory services

- **somewhereto** – a 2012 Legacy project designed to offer advice, support and a forum for young people aged 16 to 25 who are looking for a venue to practise their sport, hobby, art or craft. somewhereto is currently operating in London, Scotland, Northern Ireland and North East England, but is due to roll out nationally – www.somewhereto.com.
- **School of Everything** – lists details of informal learning groups, teachers and classes throughout the UK – also includes details of venues – <http://schoolofeverything.com/subject/all/gb/venue>.
- **Spare Place** – a map of spaces across the UK which can be used for temporary and 'pop-up' projects – it includes empty shops, church halls, fields, shopping precincts and old offices – all spaces that can be legally occupied by agreement with the owner. It's not yet a comprehensive map of every available space, but with increased use it is hoped that it will grow into a valuable resource – www.spareplace.com.

Note: not everyone will feel comfortable in an environment used primarily for the consumption of alcohol – it might be a good idea to seek your participants' views before booking a pub as a venue.



- **My Community Space** (London) – Community Matters has created a resource for groups in London to find venues which are low cost or no cost. Details of venues in the North West of England will be added soon. The website also features resources to advise you on finding, managing and making improvements to premises – www.mycommunityspace.org.uk.
- **UK-HallHire** – provides a free listing service for non-profit organisations or those with a strong community focus – www.uk-hallhire.co.uk.
- **VolResource** – a list of venues on the VolResource website – www.volresource.org.uk/services/events.htm#venues.
- **The Place Station** – the Place Station introduces owners of land and buildings across the UK to social and community entrepreneurs with ideas for transforming their local area – www.theplacestation.org.uk.
- **Village halls/community halls** – these are a time-honoured haven for voluntary arts and crafts activity, and though many have struggled financially in recent years, they remain a wonderful source of community venues.
 - Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) – www.acre.org.uk/our-work/community-assets/village-hall-information-service.
 - Northern Ireland Community Relations Council – www.community-relations.org.uk/fs/doc/directory_of_community_venues.pdf.
 - Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations’ – <http://microsites.scvo.org.uk/villagehalls/Home/Home.aspx>.
- **Schools** – many schools make facilities available for the community to use, including arts and crafts groups, as part of an ‘Extended Schools’ programme. Contact your local school directly or visit www.schoolswebdirectory.co.uk to look up details of schools in your area (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

Note: in some areas booking is done through the local authority rather than directly with the school.

C. Don't forget the obvious

The following sources of venues have been used by voluntary arts groups for decades, but are worth a quick reminder.

- **Arts centres, performance venues and galleries** – whether these are owned by the local authority, charitable trusts or private owners, professional arts venues are a tailor-made setting for arts events and workshops. Many have community or outreach programmes that you might be able to tap into in order to get favourable rates.
- **Libraries and museums** – similar to arts centres, these are usually owned by the local authority or a charitable trust. Although they are not set up specifically for voluntary arts use, they may have spaces suited to exhibitions or even performances, and certainly for planning/committee meetings etc.

D. Things to think about

- **Insurance** – if you are hiring a venue or someone has donated the use of their venue to you, find out what insurance the owner already has, and whether it covers your planned activities. Ensure that your own cover is adequate to fill any gaps. For more details, see Briefing I18, available to download from www.voluntaryarts.org/briefings.
- **Accessibility** – always consider accessibility for disabled visitors, and discuss the issue with the venue manager before deciding whether or not to use it. For more details, including a handy accessibility checklist, see Briefing I28, available to download from www.voluntaryarts.org/briefings.

Information contained here may go out of date and you are therefore advised to check its currency. Updated information may be available on the Voluntary Arts website: www.voluntaryarts.org

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