

LEADER

Community-Led Local Development



National Rural Network

LEADER Newsletter No. 5: August 2020

A Focus on the LEADER Programme 2014-2020

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LEADER Programme 2014-2020 Update

Welcome to the National Rural Network's fifth newsletter focusing on issues relating to the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme. The LEADER programme is a multi-annual programme for rural development, which is co-funded by the European Union. It is a community-led approach to local development funded through Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014 -2020. The current seven-year programme (2014-2020) will come to an end this year as far as new project commitments are concerned. Projects approved before the end of December 2020 will have up to June 2022 to complete their activities and submit claims for grant payment.

At the end of July 2020 over 3,200 projects valued at almost €125 million have been approved by the Local Action Groups (LAGs) that deliver the programme. A further 375 projects seeking €28 million in funding are currently being processed by the LAGs. This is an increase of over 500 projects and an increased spend of over €26m since the publication of our last LEADER newsletter in December 2019. Combined this represents over 90% of the LAGs available project budget for the programme.

In addition to the core project funding allocated by the LAGs, funding is also available to support Co-operation projects, where LAGs come together to jointly deliver projects and for projects under the LEADER Food Initiative which is designed to support the food sector. This funding is allocated at national level after these projects are approved by the LAG. To the end of July 2020, 116 Cooperation projects have been approved for funding worth over €3.3 million and €3.2 million has been approved for 55 Food Initiative projects.

Not only has the level of project approvals increased in 2020, payments to project promoters have also seen a significant increase. At the end of July 2020 over €62 million has been paid to project promoters in respect of approved projects, with almost €20 million being paid out in 2020 alone. Over 1,600 approved projects have now been completed and the project promoters have received their final grant payment.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis the LEADER Programme has remained operational with LAG and their Implementing Partners' staff working remotely to continue to deliver much needed support and assistance to their communities. The Department of Rural and Community Development introduced a number of administrative flexibilities to enable the continuation of the programme. These included, inter alia, provision for Evaluation Committee and LAG meetings to be held remotely, replacing the required site visit verifications with the acceptance of photographic evidence provided by the project promoter in order to satisfy this requirement and permitting the processing and payment of claims for capital projects without the erection of the required information and publicity signage being in place, where this is currently not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of these changes is clearly demonstrated by the LAGs approving almost 400 project applications with a value of €17 million and payments totalling €10 million issuing to project promoters in respect of completed works since the COVID-19 crisis began.

The LEADER Concept

The LEADER programme, established by the European Commission in 1991, is based on the 'bottom-up' approach. A European Commission report entitled 'The LEADER Approach – A basic guide', represents the rationale behind LEADER in the following manner: 'the main concept behind the LEADER initiative is that, given the diversity of European rural areas, development strategies are more effective and efficient if decided and implemented at local level by local actors, accompanied by clear and transparent procedures, the support of the relevant public administrations and the necessary technical assistance for the transfer of good practice' (European Commission, 2006, p.8). The current LEADER budget allocated to Ireland, funded through Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP), provides €250 million in financial aid to promote social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural communities, up to the end of 2020.

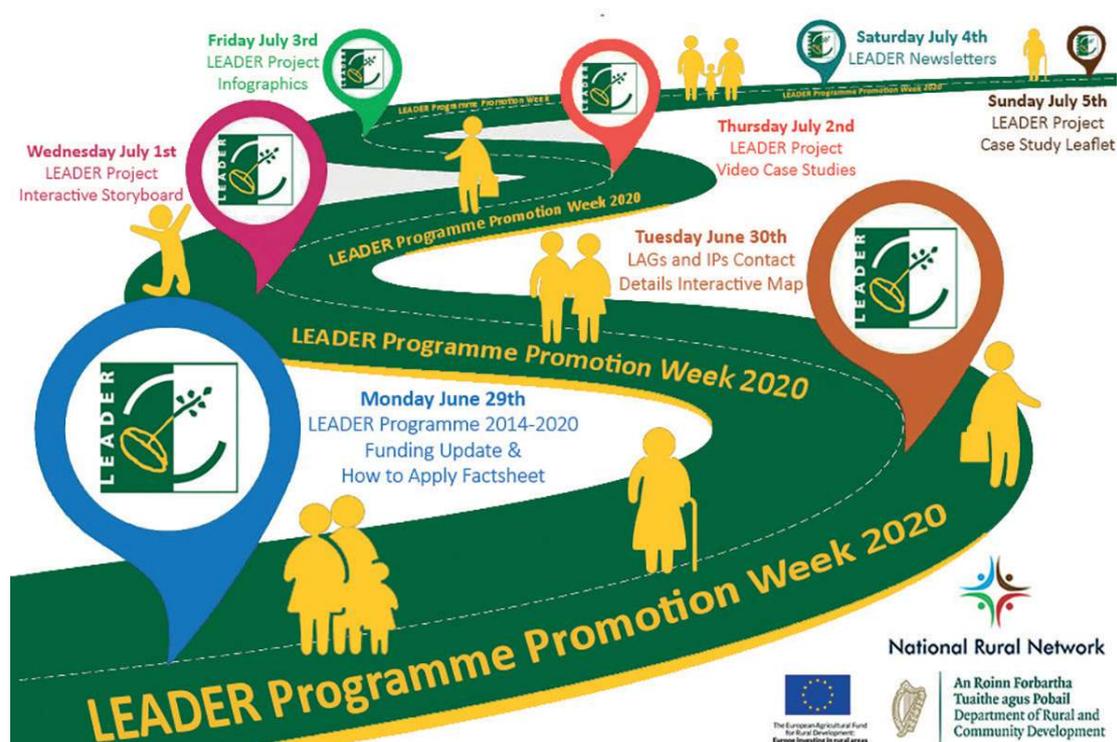
7 Key Principles of LEADER

The LEADER approach is based on 7 key principles – all of which must collaborate and positively interact for it to be successful. Indeed, it is important to consider these 7 principles as a toolkit, rather than as separate entities, that can work together to safeguard and build a brighter future for rural communities.



A detailed description of these 7 key principles of LEADER can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3304leW>

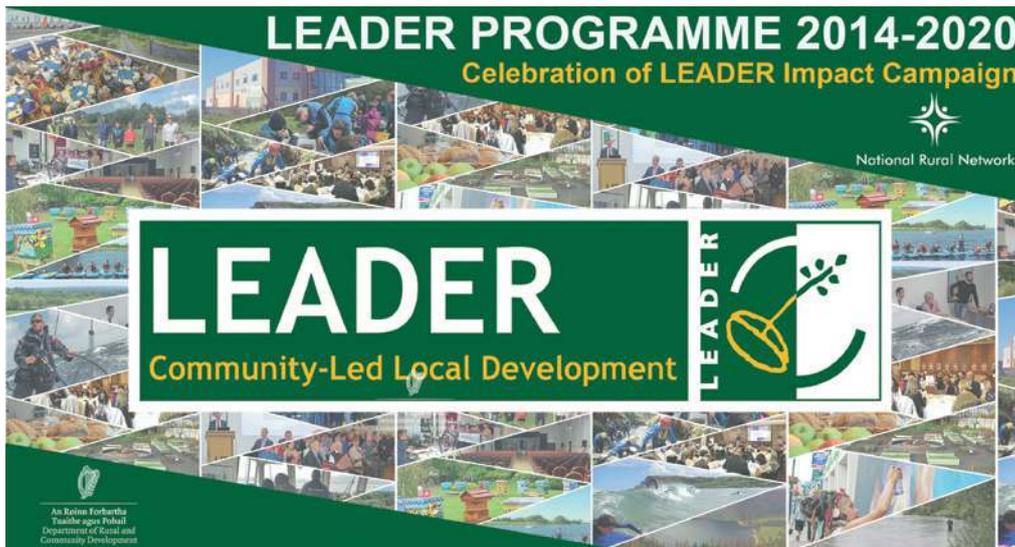
Irish NRN: LEADER Programme Promotion Week 2020



The NRN ran a 'LEADER Programme Promotion Week' on our social media channels from the 29th of June to the 5th of July 2020. This pioneering initiative provided rural communities and entrepreneurs with an in-depth insight into the LEADER Programme 2014-2020, and also helped future applicants conceptualise their ideas and see what is possible

through LEADER's unique 'bottom-up' community-led approach to rural development, particularly as they prepare to rebuild, redevelop and reenergize as part of Ireland's Covid-19 crisis recovery response. All LEADER content promoted over the course of this initiative can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3jIHham>

NRN to launch a LEADER Impact Campaign



The National Rural Network (NRN) will launch a LEADER Impact Campaign at the beginning of September, 2020. The purpose of this campaign is to celebrate the impact of the LEADER Programme on rural communities across Ireland. The term impact simply refers to a positive change or result that has come about due to the LEADER programme, in whatever form this may be e.g. a new community facility, an enhanced sense of community well-being or indeed a successful environmental project.

The campaign asks participants, who have received funding under the current LEADER Programme (2014-2020), to tell their story of how LEADER has impacted their community, enterprise, organisation or indeed local environment by creating their own short video. These videos will be a maximum of 2 minutes long and will be subject to a public

vote to decide the winning projects. There will be one winner for each thematic category (3 winners in total) as per the themes in the current LEADER Programme, namely - Theme 1: Economic Development, Enterprise & Development and Job Creation, Theme 2: Social Inclusion and Theme 3: Rural Environment.

Each winner will receive a One for All Gift Voucher to the value of €200 and will also have the chance to have their project featured as a case study with the NRN, which will be disseminated further afield in local media and with the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD). To learn more about this exciting new venture, keep an eye on the NRN website, Facebook and Twitter pages over the next few weeks for further information and updates.

LEADER Project Interactive Storyboard NRN Database

Since its inception in 1991, LEADER has provided both private enterprise and community groups with the resources necessary to actively engage and direct the economic, social development and environmental protection of their local area, through community-led local development. The NRN have developed three interactive Storyboard databases featuring 68 inspirational project examples funded under the each of the LEADER Programme 2014-2020 themes. As well as indicating the geographical location of the selected projects, this innovative dissemination platform provides a summary of each project, as well as links to further information. You can find these Storyboards in the LEADER section of the NRN website: <https://bit.ly/3jKP11Y>

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) featured these Storyboards in the Spring/Summer 2019 edition of their Rural Connections magazine (p.36-37) as



a good practice dissemination model to communicate the success of the objectives set out in Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. Please see: <https://bit.ly/3ez5Wez>

Clann Credo – Community Loan Finance: Financing Brighter Futures

Clann Credo is Ireland's leading provider of loans to community organisations, sports clubs, charities, and social enterprises. Since its establishment in 1996, more than 1,500 projects have benefited from almost €130 million in finance. Clann Credo only lends to not-for-profit projects that generate positive social or environmental impacts and have a long history of providing loans to community organisations that use LEADER funding for community projects.

Clann Credo is itself both a social enterprise and registered charity with a voluntary board of directors. 'We are part of the Community and Voluntary sector, so we understand it. We see the sector's ability to repay loans where the banks often don't – that's because we understand the opportunity community organisations have to combine fundraising with traded income and volunteer engagement to make their projects succeed' said Jim Boyle, Acting CEO. He added 'we never look for personal guarantees or impose penalties for early repayment. We know that we are working with people whose sole ambition is to improve the quality of life in their community'.

The board and staff at Clann Credo believe loan finance can be invaluable to community groups because it enables projects to happen faster. Rather than fundraising all the money required before initiating a project, loan finance enables the project to start and loans can be repaid by the project's traded income (if there is any) or subsequent fundraising. Also, because the LEADER programme requires community groups to pay for goods and services before they draw down their grant; short term bridging loans can be very helpful to groups in this phase of their LEADER funded project.

The ethos of Clann Credo is to work with community groups and help their projects succeed, as Tracey Hannon, North and West Regional Manager stated 'we won't lend to a group if we think it's the wrong path for them to go down. Sometimes we need to work with groups to establish a robust model for future income streams before we put their loan application before the evaluation committee, but we want to get projects over the line, we see the value to community'.

Clann Credo's mission is to create a fairer society and brighter futures by providing loan finance to community groups and not-for-profit organisations. They finance a huge range of activities including:

- Community Facilities
- Community Tourism Projects
- Disability Services
- Sports and Recreation Facilities
- Youth Projects
- Childcare Facilities
- Social Housing
- Environmental Sustainability Projects

Just some of the examples that Clann Credo have supported include Hook Tourism in Wexford and An Gairdín Beo in Carlow.



Hook Tourism markets an impressive range of activity packages on the Hook peninsula and is a wonderful example of a community coming together to promote the range of outdoor activities they offer. See: <https://bit.ly/3jFGNBM>



An Gairdín Beo is a two-acre community garden in the centre of Carlow town, which includes a vegetable growing area and a biodiversity area, among other elements, which is used by local schools, voluntary and community groups. See: <https://bit.ly/3fblTGh>

To see the range of community projects that Clann Credo have supported, see www.clanncredo.ie. For information on a variety of grant funds and community sector supports, follow Clann Credo on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

LEADER's Leading Role in Creating Smart Villages and Rural Towns

As the LEADER Programme is widely regarded as one of Europe's most successful rural development programmes, it is well positioned to forge a strong relationship with the European Commission's Smart Villages initiative, launched in 2017. Smart Villages (and Smart Rural Towns in an Irish context) are rural areas and communities which build on, and enhance their existing strengths and assets through creative thinking and by embracing innovation to create desirable places for rural people to live and work. In creating a Smart Village, community groups and individuals often overcome local challenges by exploring and implementing practical and tangible solutions. In particular, rural communities explore how local services, such as health, social services, education, energy, transport and retail, can be enhanced and sustained through the deployment of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools and community-led actions and projects. As such, whilst digitisation is key to the creation of a Smart Village, social innovation is also paramount i.e. thinking smartly to create vibrant and sustainable rural communities. Dr Shane Conway, Researcher with the NRN at NUI Galway explains that 'whilst the word 'Smart' is often automatically associated with technology due to the age of the smart phone we live in, it is also important to remember that this initiative is as much about thinking smartly to achieve rural sustainability, viability and vibrancy at village and rural town level, as it is to embrace technology at local community level'.

The NRN and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) are participating in a European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Thematic Group on Smart Villages, which explores innovative ways of creating more vibrant, sustainable and attractive rural areas. The 12th Thematic Group meeting took place on the 2nd of June 2020, in the form of a webinar. Participants were given the opportunity to learn from and exchange ideas from various Member States for supporting Smart Villages in the future CAP Strategic Plans and other EU Funds. Dymphna Harney from the DRCD presented 'Ideas for supporting Smart Villages in Ireland' in the next CAP programming period at this meeting. Background documents, presentations and images from this webinar can be found on the ENRD website: <https://bit.ly/30sg6t5>

The NRN, in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development, also held a national seminar on this initiative entitled 'Smart Villages and Rural Towns in Ireland: Revitalising Rural Areas through Community-Led Innovation' on 4th of July 2019 in Athlone. This event was structured to build a greater knowledge base around the Smart Villages initiative, and demonstrate how it can be planned, implemented and realized in an Irish context, particularly in the context of the design of the LEADER Programme post 2020. All guest speaker presentations and a full report on the 'Smart Villages and Rural Towns' national seminar have been added to the NRN website. Please see: <https://bit.ly/2xlrPEI>

Smart Villages and Rural Towns Seminar Presentations



A series of informative videos filmed by the NRN during this event with experts in this area can be found on the NRN's YouTube Channel: <https://bit.ly/2EoswCA>

A full report from this seminar can be found on the NRN website: <https://bit.ly/39vEE73>



Dingle selected as the Irish Representative in the New Smart Rural Project



The 'Smart Rural' project is a new two and a half-year project coordinated by E40 Group and supported by the European Commission (DG AGRI) with the overall aim to promote and inspire villages/rural towns to develop and implement smart village approaches and strategies across Europe, and to draw conclusions and support future CAP interventions on smart villages. 21 rural communities from throughout the EU have now been selected from a total of 736 applications (of which 25 were from the Republic of Ireland) to receive guidance and technical support through the project, following a rigorous review and assessment process by the Smart Rural Project team and the EU Commission. Dingle, in Co. Kerry, have been

chosen as the Irish representative in this exciting initiative. Led by their Local Development Company (NEWKD), Dingle have pursued a strong evidence-based approach to Smart Villages, and emphasise inter-community collaboration and strong local governance. More information about Dingle and the Smart Rural 21 project can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3f0eDQQ>

As all rural communities throughout the EU are unique in their own way, and are thus 'smart' in their own way, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' or set criteria in becoming a Smart Village, however Ireland's position in relation to the development of Smart Villages (and Smart Rural Towns in an Irish content) is that it can be greatly enhanced through the successful delivery and modernisation of the LEADER Programme. LEADER has proved its value and endurance in supporting rural dwellers and communities to realise their potential, and overcome various challenges in Ireland and indeed across the EU over the past 29 years through its community-led approach to rural development. Rural development strategies and projects such as the Smart Villages initiative are considered to be most effective and efficient when decided and implemented at a local level by local actors, hence the appropriateness of building on LEADER's 'bottom up' framework in supporting the economic and social development of local areas in the coming period.



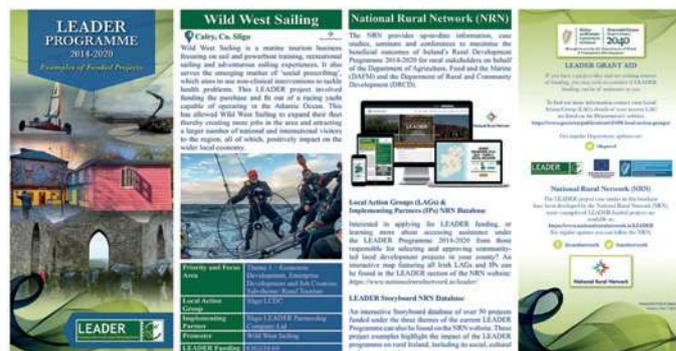
LEADER Project featured in Changing Ireland Magazine



A LEADER-funded project with the Meath River Rescue Service was featured in the Spring 2020 edition of the Changing Ireland Magazine (p.16). The Meath River Rescue Service provides a very important voluntary service within their community of Navan. Set up in 1996, the organisation has grown and expanded its capacity over the years largely due to the help of LEADER funding. This particular project

used LEADER funding to help Meath River Rescue Service to upgrade their equipment, including new boat engines and specialised diving suits, to allow them to carry out their life saving and life-altering search and recovery activities with up to spec equipment allowing them to deliver a more efficient service in a safer manner for their volunteers. You can read the article here: <https://bit.ly/2P1vxSg>

NRN LEADER Case Studies Videos and Leaflet



Looking for inspirational LEADER funding examples and ideas? If so, then check out the NRN's exciting collection of LEADER Case Study videos. These videos showcase eight diverse projects located throughout Ireland that have been funded under the LEADER Programme 2014-2020. Individuals and community groups who have availed of LEADER funding speak passionately in these videos about the importance of the programme and the benefits and success the funding has brought them. Please see: <https://bit.ly/3fP54me>

The NRN and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) in conjunction with a number of Local Action Groups (LAGs), Implementing Partners (IPs) and Project Promoters have also published an informative new booklet last year showcasing a range of different LEADER supported project examples from across the country, funded under each of the LEADER sub-themes of Enterprise Development, Rural Towns, Rural Tourism, Broadband, Rural Youth, Basic Services Targeted at Hard to Reach Communities, Protection and Sustainable Use of Water Resources, Improvement of Local Biodiversity and the Development of Renewable Energy. This booklet can be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/37YZYB6>

LEADER 2014-2020 Project Case Study Booklet In Publication

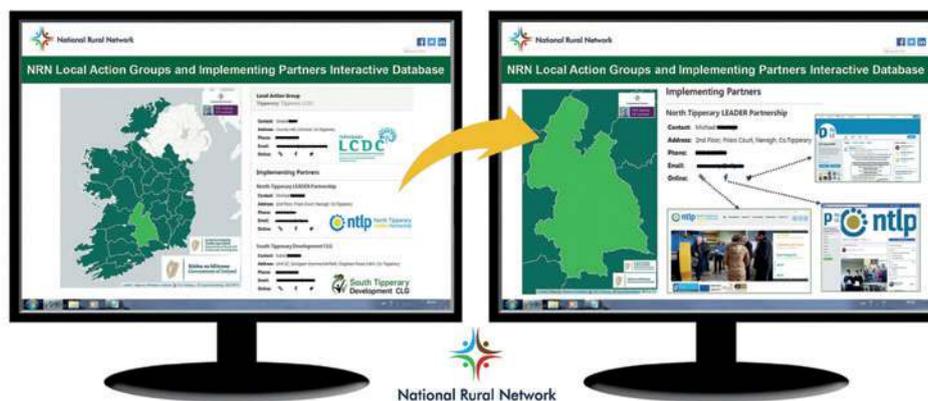


The National Rural Network are stepping up our efforts to highlight and promote the beneficial outcomes of Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014- 2020 by producing a LEADER Project Case Study booklet on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). This publication, which will be launched towards the end of the year, will highlight 72 inspirational LEADER project examples located throughout Ireland. The booklet will detail the main aims, objectives and background of the selected LEADER case study examples in order to help future applicants further see what is possible through LEADER's community-led approach to rural development. Through its 'bot-

tom up' framework, LEADER supports the delivery of local development actions which address the overarching needs of rural communities throughout Ireland in an innovative, integrated and inclusive manner. The new LEADER booklet will also feature three informative infographics illustrating the geographical location of selected case studies funded under each of the three LEADER themes, as well as a case study on the Smart Villages and Rural Towns initiative. All 29 LAGs and their respective IPs will be represented in this publication. This good practice dissemination platform is just one of a number of multi-method communication strategies being implemented by the Irish NRN to maximize the success of the objectives set out in the RDP 2014-2020.



Irish Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners (IPs) Database



Interested in applying for LEADER funding, or learning more about accessing assistance under the LEADER Programme 2014-2020 from those responsible for selecting and approving community-led local development projects in your county? There is still time left to apply! An interactive map featuring the contact details for all Irish LAGs and IPs can be found in the LEADER section of the NRN website: <https://bit.ly/3hCXBHN>

This helpful 'one-stop-shop' map outlines the geographical boundaries of each of the 29 LAGs located throughout Ire-

land as well as an updated list of the Implementing Partners (IPs) located in each LAG region. This freely available database provides those interested in accessing funding under the LEADER Programme 2014-2020, with easy and convenient access to information about the Local Development Strategy and geographical coverage of their LAGs. It also contains relevant contact details, as well as links to each of the LAGs and IPs websites and social media pages. A booklet version of this map can also be downloaded from the NRN website.

Process and Practicalities: The LEADER Approach Explained

The LEADER Programme provides funding to support community-led rural development. We explore how the LEADER funding process works in practice providing an overview of the main stages and requirements when making an application.

Some basics: Where to apply and project types supported

Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners (IPs)

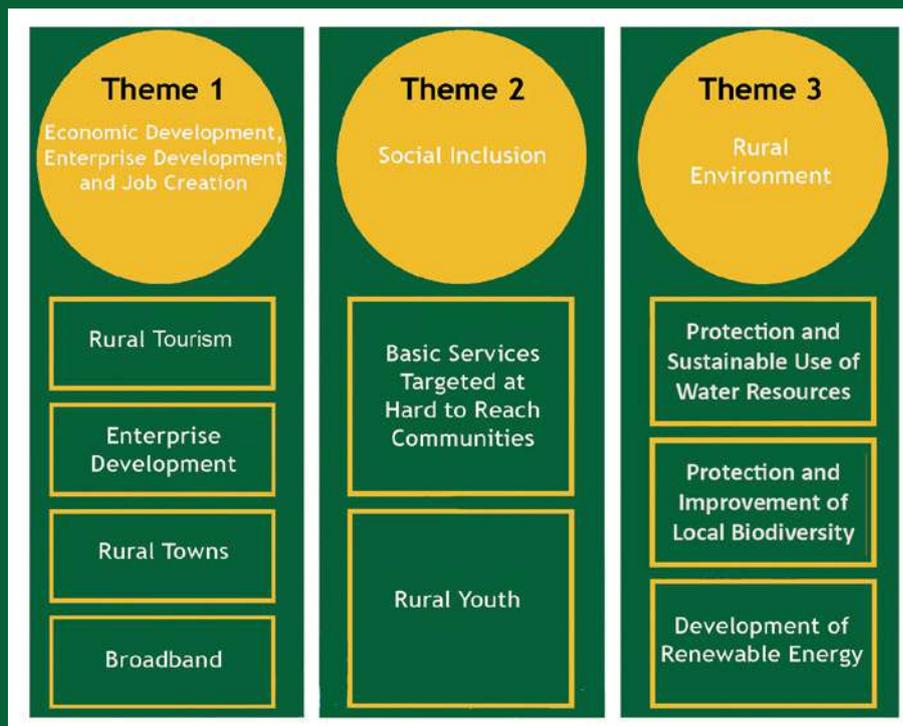
Decisions on LEADER funding applications are made at a local level by a network of 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs). They approve applications that align with the objectives of their Local Development Strategy, which is developed in consultation with the local communities. Local Development Companies in each area are responsible for the day to day management and co-ordination of the LEADER Programme, either as Implementing Partners (IPs) in a wider LAG or by acting as the LAG itself. Applications for LEADER funding are made to these Local Development Companies. Project Officers within these companies are the first port of call when thinking about applying for LEADER funding.

Themes, funding calls and rates

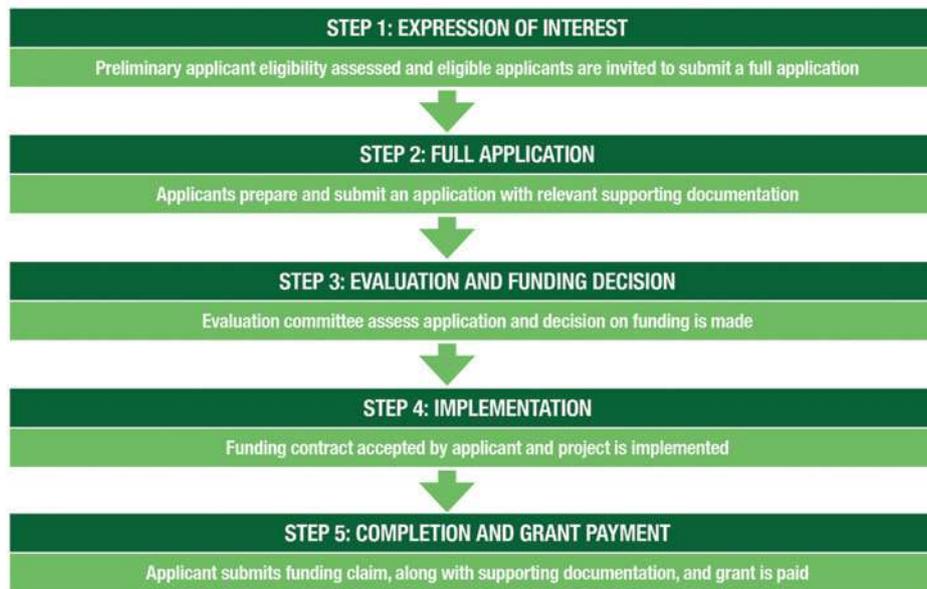
The LEADER Programme 2014-2020 targets funding towards key areas in need of support. Projects are supported in three thematic areas (1. Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation, 2. Social Inclusion & 3. Rural Environment). These three themes are broad enough to enable funding of a diversity of community-led projects both from private enterprise and community groups. Some types of activity cannot be funded such as insurance, legal expenses, planning application fees and working capital.

LAGs may operate a 'rolling call' for LEADER funding applications and accept applications on an ongoing basis. Targeted calls allow LAGs to concentrate funding in specific strategic areas of need or opportunity.

Depending on the nature of the project and the applicant type, different rates of funding aid apply. For example, analysis and development projects from a private business can be funded up to 75% of the total project costs while for community applicants it is up to 90%.



Applying for LEADER funding



Step 1: Expression of interest

Before formally applying for LEADER funding applicants must submit an 'Expression of Interest (EOI)'. This helps to establish a project's eligibility, such as its fit with Local Development Strategy objectives. It also facilitates applicants to become familiar with the application process and requirements. EOIs are then assessed by the Project Officers. Eligible applicants are invited to submit a full application.

Step 2: Making a full application

When submitting an application for LEADER funding details required depend on the type of applicant and project. For example, farmers need to provide their herd number and businesses their company registration number. Applicants must also include details of the proposed project such as a timeline, its main activities and anticipated local impacts. Each LAG uses the same standardised application form.

Budget and procurement

A budget must also be provided. If the project is also supported through other funding sources, these must be outlined and evidence documented. Previous public funding support must also be disclosed. Carrying out a procurement process is also required.

Supporting documentation

A range of supporting documentation must also be included with an application. Procurement evidence must be supplied. Accounts for three years and bank statements (three months minimum) for all accounts held are required. Depending on the applicant, different types of accounts are acceptable. Other requirements can also be needed as relevant. Specific requirements for individual projects can be discussed and determined with the Project Officers.

Match Funding

Projects generally require match funding. This can come from private funds or for community applicants also other public funds. Public funding from other EU sources is not permitted as match funding.

Step 3: Application Evaluation and Funding Decision

An evaluation committee from the LAG evaluates applications using set criteria and makes a recommendation to the LAG decision making members as to the suitability of the project for funding. If a project is not approved for funding applicants are informed of the reasons for this.

Step 4: Implementation

Once the applicant accepts the contract they can implement their project in line with its terms and conditions. The LAG must also check that the applicant has adequate resources (or bridging finance) to deliver the project. Bridging finance can be sourced for example through lending organisations such as Clann Credo, Community Finance Ireland, Micro Finance Ireland or Credit Unions.

Step 5: Completion and Grant payment

When the project is complete, the applicant submits a claim form to the LAG with the required supporting documentation such as invoices and the relevant bank statements. A Project Officer will carry out a site visit to verify the project is complete. A grant payment claim is then made by the LAG to the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). Once the funds are paid to the LAG the grant is paid by electronic fund transfer to the applicant's designated account as soon as possible.

More information

To find contact details for your local LAG and IP: <https://bit.ly/2X0OhFN>

This guide was featured in the March 2020 edition of the European Network for Rural Development's (ENRD) monthly newsletter. Please see: <https://bit.ly/33WZDwX>

Join the NRN for Free

If you are Interested in issues related to the LEADER Programme, please sign up to the National Rural Network (NRN) on our website on www.nationalruralnetwork.ie. The NRN essentially acts as the ‘dissemination vehicle’ for Ireland’s Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).

Our ambition is to bring the RDP into the lives of as many people as possible by communicating its key opportunities and outputs to all relevant stakeholders.

For regular updates follow us on:

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		 Riailtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland  An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine  An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail Department of Rural and Community Development	 <p>Ireland's European Structural and Investment Funds Programmes 2014-2020 Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union</p>  The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas 
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