



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar
gyfer Datblygu Gwledig;
Ewrop yn Buddsoddi mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
European Agricultural Fund for
Rural Development;
Europe Investing in Rural Areas

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



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Welsh Government

Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020

LEADER Co-operation 2014-2020 – Supplementary Guidance

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Sub-Measure 19.3:

Preparation and implementation of Co-operation activities of the Local Action Group

This is a supplementary guidance document focusing on Measure 19.3: *the preparation and implementation of Co-operation activities of the Local Action Group*. This document should be read together with, and does not replace, the Welsh Government's documents: "LEADER Guidance" and "LEADER Local Development Strategies Guidance".

These Guidance Notes are for information and are not intended to replace the relevant EU Regulations, State aid regulations and/or Welsh domestic legislation, neither are these Notes a definitive interpretation of those legal frameworks. Please note that the detailed rules for the eligibility of activities and/or expenditure may be subject to change throughout the Programme period.

The European Commission has developed guidance for the implementation of LEADER Co-operation activities for the 2014 to 2020 period. This reference document sets out the Commissions framework and key processes associated with the delivery of LEADER Co-operation actions.

http://docs.enrd.eu/newsletter/20141119_LEADER_Cooperation-Guide-2014-20.pdf

Introduction and background

LEADER is a community-led local development (CLLD) method which has been used for over 20 years to engage local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their rural areas.

Co-operation is one of the 7 key principles of the LEADER approach. EAFRD and the EMFF also have specific provisions for CLLD Co-operation.

The support for Co-operation is a mandatory element of the LEADER measure in all Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

Co-operation of a Local Action Group (LAG) area with other geographical areas can be a key component of a LAG's Local Development Strategy or an additional asset to this strategy. Co-operation can evolve in stages from exchange of experience, to the transfer of promising practice to a common activity. Co-operation with other territories implementing LEADER or other forms of Community Led Local Development (CLLD) can also be a strategic tool which the Local Action Group can use to reach the critical mass needed for some projects or to pool complementary resources and expertise.

In addition to inter-territorial co-operation (between LAGs within a Member State), transnational co-operation gives supplementary European added value to local development.

Co-operation is a way to widen local views and bring new knowledge to the area in order to improve local strategies. It can boost the innovative character of local development actions and contribute to increased competitiveness of the area through e.g. capacity building, bringing in new business partners, the diffusion of innovation, know-how and new skills.

Co-operation is a mandatory element of the LEADER measure in the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, therefore, it is a requirement that each LAG must undertake at least one co-operation project or activity during the programme period.

Scope of LEADER Co-operation 2014-2020

The range and geographical scope of possible partners with whom LAGs can co-operate under the LEADER measure is set out in Article 44 (2) of Regulation (EU) No. 1305/2013. This is interpreted quite widely taking into account the different forms of existing partnerships of rural areas with other geographical areas within and outside the EU

Apart from other local action groups, the partners of a local action group under the EAFRD may be:

- (a) a group of local public and private partners in a rural territory that is implementing a local development strategy within or outside the Union. The scope of action of this group has to be similar to that of a LAG, but does not have to comply with all the features stipulated in Article 33 of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 regarding Community-led local development strategies;
- (b) a group of local public and private partners in a non- rural territory that is implementing a local development strategy.

However only projects selected by LAGs under the LEADER measure are eligible for funding from the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

LEADER Co-operation in Wales – comparing the approach between 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods

2007-2013 Programme period:

- 18 Local Action Groups (LAGs)
- 8 Preparatory Technical Support projects were undertaken
- 3 trans-national Co-operation projects were implemented
- 16 inter-territorial Co-operation projects were implemented
- LAGs proposed projects for selection by the Welsh Government (as Managing Authority)
- Initially there was a rolling process then later in the Programme period this moved to bidding rounds
- LAGs made a presentation and participated in a panel interview as part of selection process in addition to the submission of a written application form

LEADER Co-operation in Wales - 2014-2020 Programme period:

- 18 Local Action Groups (LAGs) covering eligible wards of 21 of the 22 Local Authority areas in Wales.
- Local Development Strategies (LDS) have been approved and budget allocations have been agreed.
- All LDS contain a commitment to undertake at least 1 Co-operation project during the programme period.
- Preparatory Technical Support and Co-operation projects will be selected via a **local selection procedure** conducted by the LAGs using part of the budget they have been allocated (under M19.3).

- The eligibility and selection criteria should follow the same approach used for local projects implemented under the LDS. Please refer to the Welsh Government's "LEADER Guidance" and "LEADER Local Development Strategies Guidance".
- Even where, as in Wales, the selection is LAG-led the process should be made clear and transparent so it can be understood easily locally and by LAGs from other Member States. For the selection of projects it is recommended that the LAG operates either a rolling submission or quarterly bidding windows (4 per annum closing on the 31st March, 30th June, 30th September, 31st December) to minimise delays. If the same closing dates are used by all LAGs in Wales (other than those with a rolling process) then this will simplify engagement by LAGs outside Wales. Otherwise there is a risk of confusion being caused by LAGs having different deadlines within Wales).
- It is recommended to find ways for giving for instance provisional approval waiting for the approval of other Managing Authorities within a reasonable time frame.
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Preparatory Technical Support (PTS)

Prior to submitting a full proposal for a Co-operation project, applicants can apply to the Local Action Group (LAG) for costs related to exchanging experience (e.g. meetings with potential partners, travel, accommodation and interpreter's fees) or project pre-development (e.g. project feasibility study, consulting for specific issues, translation costs, additional staff costs).

The European Commission has made PTS a mandatory element of the support to LEADER Co-operation, in order to boost the uptake of Co-operation activities by LAGs.

It may be that the preparatory work is undertaken but ultimately the LAG decides not to engage in the Co-operation project. However, preparatory technical support can only be granted under the condition that, at the time of application, the implementation of a concrete project is envisaged. The LAG must check before granting Preparatory Technical Support that the applicant is able to identify the objectives/character of a planned project and has had sufficient communication with potential project partners to merit further exploration through Preparatory Technical Support. This information will need to be captured on the application form. All parts of the United Kingdom have agreed to use a common template for preparatory support (Annex 1).

Co-operation projects

A Co-operation project:

“can be described as a concrete activity with clearly identified deliverables producing benefits for the territories. Projects might also be focused on capacity building and transfer of experience on local development through e.g. common publications, training seminars, twinning arrangements (exchange of programme managers and staff) leading to the adoption of common methodological and working methods or to the elaboration of a joint

or coordinated development work.”

Paragraph 3.2.2 of the Commission’s LEADER Co-operation Guidance (19/11/2014)

There are three main categories of LEADER Co-operation projects:

1. Transnational Co-operation projects (projects between LAGs in Wales and partners from other Member States or partners from territories in third countries outside of the European Union);
2. Inter-territorial Co-operation (i.e. within the UK Member State: Welsh LAG(s) co-operating with LAG(s) from Scotland, Northern Ireland or England); and
3. Inter-territorial Co-operation involving only Welsh LAGs.

Transnational Co-operation projects

LAGs in Wales who are involved with a transnational Co-operation project will be responsible for assessing and approving their part of the overall project, as well as issuing the grant award, processing claims and making payments, based on their agreed financial contribution towards the project.

A Transnational Partnership Agreement template is available to assist LAGs (Annex 2).

This may be particularly useful where a Welsh LAG has been selected to act as the lead partner for the project, however, the template is not mandatory and the LAGs involved may choose to use a template provided by one of the other countries involved in the project.

Inter-territorial Co-operation - UK

Inter-territorial projects will be captured and reported on separately to transnational projects. However, the process and administration of projects involving LAGs in other parts of the UK will effectively be the same as for transnational projects. Welsh LAGs will be responsible for assessing and approving their part of the overall project, as well as issuing the grant award, processing claims and making payments, based on their agreed financial contribution towards the project.

Inter-territorial Co-operation – Wales only

For Co-operation involving Welsh LAGs only:

- A single application will be developed and then submitted to all the selected LAGs at the same time
- Participating LAGs will agree a Lead LAG to administer the project and act as the main point of contact for the applicant
- The Accountable Body for the Lead LAG will make all payments and re-claim them from Welsh Government
- Second nominated LAG(s)/Accountable Body/Bodies can verify claims prior to payment

An Inter-territorial Co-operation Partnership Agreement template is also available for applicants and LAGs to use (Annex 3).

Co-operation Partnership Agreements

In all types of Co-operation projects, it is recommended that partners pre-define/agree the key criteria related to the activities to be selected and carried out. It is also important that the partners keep each other informed about progress with the project and any changes to its implementation, in order to allow for necessary adjustments that ensure the achievement of mutually agreed project objectives.

At the beginning of a LEADER Co-operation project, the partners should sign a Partnership Agreement clearly specifying the tasks of each partner.

The Lead Partner

- Co-operation projects may designate a “Lead Partner” (or “Co-ordinating LAG”): this is not compulsory but is highly recommended.
- Without a Lead Partner there has to be an extremely clear division of tasks between the partners and a very high and equal level of commitment.
- The responsibilities of the lead partner can be covered by a higher project budget than the other partners. This can either be financed from the LAG or Programme budget for Co-operation of the partner concerned; or by a contribution from the other project partners.

The roles and responsibilities of the lead partner should normally include:

- Steering and coordinating the design of the project - including the preparation of the Partnership Agreement between the partners;
- Co-ordinating and monitoring the applications for finance by each partner;
- Steering and co-ordinating the implementation of the project and the tasks to be carried out by each partner (the organisation of exchanges, joint outputs and so on);
- Monitoring and communicating achievements and financial progress.

Role of European Network for Rural Development & National Rural Networks 2014-2020

Transnational co-operation projects have particular challenges associated with them because it may be necessary to have different elements of the costs approved and the claims paid by different Managing Authorities. In recognition of these issues, Regulation (EU) No. 1305/2013 has provisions that should help with the implementation by putting certain obligations on Managing Authorities for the management of transnational co-operation, as well as obligations for both the European Network for Rural Development and the National Rural Networks, in terms of the technical support for transnational co-operation.

A considerable amount of guidance about co-operation activities is available from the Wales Rural Network Support Unit, the Commission’s own website and the European Network for Rural Development.

European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)

ENRD has a clear mandate to:

- support both transnational initiatives and the National Rural Networks as regards LEADER Co-operation
- co-operate with the networking and technical support bodies for CLLD set up by the other ESI-Funds, also specially as regards transnational Co-operation

National Rural Networks (NRNs)

The NRNs have a very specific focus on the provision of technical assistance and facilitation of co-operation activities of LAGs. This can be done through different training and technical tools, but can also include the provision of individual or collective consultancy or mentoring.

Wales Rural Network Support Unit (WRNSU)

In Wales the WRNSU will:

- facilitate LEADER Co-operation by assisting LAGs to identify opportunities for co-operation by connecting and stimulating ideas.
- liaise with the other UK NRNs and ENRD and will share information on Co-operation projects in other Member States and assist LAGs with Partner Search

The Welsh Government, as Managing Authority, is obliged by the European Commission to make public the national or regional administrative procedures concerning the selection of TNC projects and a list of eligible costs at the latest two years after the date of the approval of their Rural Development Programmes.