



MID ULSTER
Rural Development
Partnership

Co-Operation

The Partnership recognises the importance of Co-operation actions as a priority for the 2014 - 2020 Programme with a particular emphasis on cross border projects.

Our central location within Northern Ireland bordering six neighbouring Council as well as our border location with Monaghan creates good opportunities for co-operation within and between different LAGs and on a wider cross border basis.

In working to achieve this, the partnership will:

- Establish a co-operation working group comprising of LAG Board members
- Focus on the development of opportunities afforded by its unique landscape and natural resources
- Identify opportunities to strengthen enterprise, entrepreneurship and tourism linkages
- Make provision for the development of a least 2 North / South co-operation projects
- Identify further opportunities to involve East / West and other European partners
- Allocate 7% of its project budget to cooperation actions (circa £600,000) over the programme period

Objective

To use and improve territorial and transnational co-operation in order to:

- Strengthen the innovative capacity of the LAG
- Transfer knowledge and practice in support of achieving the Partnership's overall strategic aim
- Establish and strengthen partnership working and development of joint projects
- Leverage additional opportunities, benefits and resources within the rural region.

Types of Support

In procedural terms, Cooperation can be considered to take place in three successive phases:

1. Phase One - Networking

A key element of the animation activity of the LAG is networking. This provides the opportunity for LAGs to identify and develop links with other LAGs and organisations. Networking is considered as the starting point for Cooperation activity.

2. Phase Two - Preparatory Technical support (Pre-Development phase)

These actions precede the full Cooperation project and allow LAGs to investigate the merit and potential to develop concrete actions that could form a full project. A Pre-Development project could involve a feasibility study, market analysis and / or elaboration of the common issue towards a series of actions of mutual benefit to all of the LAG areas involved. This type of action by its nature will inform whether or not a joint action should proceed.

The support for preparatory technical support can only be granted under the condition that a LAG can demonstrate that it is envisaging the implementation of a concrete project. This means that it should at least identify the objectives and the character of a planned project. Receiving preparatory technical support does not imply an obligation to later on carry out such a project.

3. Phase Three - the Cooperation project (Implementation of the concrete project)

This phase involves the implementation of a concrete joint project with clearly defined deliverables producing benefits for all of the participating territories. The project is managed under a co-ordinating / Lead LAG.

In all types of cooperation projects, partners must pre-define and agree the key criteria related to the activities to be carried out. This will be documented in a Cooperation Agreement. It is also important that the cooperation 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.

Eligible Costs

Costs incurred by LAGs involved in networking activity (Phase 1) could include for example, travel and accommodation. These costs are payable from the LAG's Animation budget.

The costs eligible under Preparatory Technical support (Phase 2) can include:

- costs related to exchange of experience (e.g. meetings with potential partners, travel, accommodation, and interpreter's fees);
- project pre-development cost (e.g. project feasibility study, consulting for specific issues, translation costs, additional staff costs).

For Cooperation projects (Phase 3), Common costs are associated with cooperation coordination and activities incurred and jointly shared among partners. Local costs are incurred by a LAG for activities that directly relate to that LAGs activity on a cooperation project and the cost is not shared with other LAGs. These projects are expected to be principally Capital in nature.

Ineligible Costs

In addition to the costs defined as Ineligible for support under other LEADER Schemes, the operation of umbrella / small grant schemes as part of a Cooperation project will not be supported.

Beneficiaries

As listed in Article 44(2) of the EAFRD Regulation, the direct partners of a Local Action Group under the EAFRD may be:

- a group of local public and private partners in a rural territory that is implementing a local development strategy within or outside the Union,
- a group of local public and private partners in a non-rural territory that is implementing a local development strategy.

Only actions led by LAGs selected for support under LEADER for NIRD P will be eligible for EAFRD funding. The LAG will be the beneficiary of funding i.e. it will be the recipient of the Letter of Offer for the Cooperation project.

LAG-led Cooperation projects may involve associate partners who are statutory-sector and / or publicly-funded and operate within the relevant LAG's territory. The principles on the eligibility of operations depending on location laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation (1303/2013) have to be respected, especially as regards expenditure in countries outside the Union.

Eligibility Criteria

The qualifying criteria for Cooperation projects are as follows:

- The cooperation action must involve at least one LAG selected under LEADER of the NI Rural Development Programme;
- It must be implemented under the responsibility of a coordinating LAG;

- It must have clearly set out actions and outcomes with clear plans for dissemination of results;
- It must involve the implementation of a concrete, joint action.

Actions must be non-profit taking and led by a LAG.

State Aid

All State aid under this Scheme will comply with EU rules on State aid.

Many of the actions under this Scheme will not constitute State Aid either because the aid supports non-economic activity or because one of the conditions in Article 107(1) of the Treaty are not satisfied e.g. there is no effect on inter-community trade.

State aid falling within the following aid categories will be paid in accordance with block exemption Regulation (EU) 651/2014 as follows:

- Aid for culture and heritage conservation will comply with Article 53.
- Aid for sport for multi-functional recreational infrastructure will comply with Article 55.
- Aid to local infrastructure will comply with Article 56.

Alternatively the measure can utilise de minimis Regulation (EU) 1407/2013.

Intervention Rates

Costs incurred by a NI LAG for an approved Preparatory Technical action (Phase 2) may be reimbursed at a rate of up to 100% from EAFRD funds. There is a maximum grant ceiling of £5,000 per preparatory action per LAG. There is no restriction on the number of preparatory projects that a LAG may engage in.

The total cost for NI LAGs implementing a Cooperation project (Phase 3) will be funded at 75% maximum aid intensity. There is a maximum grant ceiling of £400,000 per Cooperation project per NI LAG. Funding is available for projects that are principally Capital in nature. Relevant State Aid limitations must also be recognised.

The involvement of other organisations may help to lever in financial support in the form of cash and / or in-kind contributions. LAG members' time-spend within a Cooperation action may also be counted

as an eligible Voluntary Labour contribution. Voluntary Labour may represent (i) up to 5% of the total cost for the relevant LAG or (ii) £20,000 equivalent maximum value, whichever is the lesser. The standard rules and rates for Voluntary Labour under Priority Six apply.

There is no restriction on the number of Cooperation projects that a LAG may engage in. Each NI LAG is expected to participate in a minimum of two full Cooperation projects involving partner LAGs from the Republic of Ireland and delivered under the All-Island LEADER Cooperation Scheme.

Payments

All grant payments will be made retrospectively by claim. Advances are not available for Cooperation projects. Local Authorities, who are providing the Administration Support for LAGs, are also expected to be the lead financial actor for Cooperation projects on behalf of the LAG.

Please note: This information may be subject to change as the programme progresses.