

Common Guidance

Rural Networks across Europe have been focusing on LEADER Transnational Cooperation. Key requests are for more harmonised rules, simplified procedures, and better communication around guidelines and potential project partners. This section of the toolkit highlights the work undertaken by Northern Ireland (and the wider UK) and Ireland to agree common guidance and templates for the development of Cooperation projects.

Individual Member States will, of course, have specific requirements relevant to their individual Programmes. The specific requirements of Northern Ireland and Ireland are contained in the next sections of this toolkit. While there are some necessary distinctions relating to each Programme, significant work has been undertaken to align the process, which inevitably is key in determining whether Cooperation is possible.

A Common Approach to Cooperation

Cooperation projects must:

- Address themes and objectives that are important for the participating groups and their rural areas i.e. the themes and objectives identified within the Local Development Strategy (LDS) of Local Action Groups (LAGs).
- Deliver added value to the LAG areas, the activities targeted, the people involved and/or the local populations. 
- Have a clear and defined rationale for cooperating i.e. deliver benefits over and above what each group could do on their own.
- Have well defined and realistic objectives that are identified as part of the application.

Types of Support



Cooperation projects take time to identify, plan, implement and manage. It is therefore important that projects are implemented in conditions that recognise the gradual nature of Cooperation.

As part of this process LAGs are encouraged to consider engaging with other organisations that may be able to assist in the development and implementation of Cooperation actions.

The 3 phases of a Cooperation project agreed for Northern Ireland and Ireland include:-

Phase One - Networking



A key element of the animation activity of the LAG is networking. This provides LAGs with the opportunity to identify and develop links with other LAGs and organisations. Networking is considered as the starting point for Cooperation activity. Costs incurred by LAGs involved in this type of networking activity, such as travel and accommodation, are payable from the LAG's existing animation budget.

Phase Two – Preparatory Technical Support (Pre-Development Phase)



Phase two precedes the full Cooperation project and allows LAGs and its partners to investigate the merit and potential to develop concrete actions that could form a full Cooperation 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.



Please note it is not mandatory to undertake a preparatory project. If the project details are sufficiently worked up and a project partnership is already in place then a LAG can move straight to the submission of a full project application (Phase three).

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 the pre-development support should at least identify the objectives and the character of a planned project. Receiving Preparatory Technical Support does not imply an obligation to subsequently carry out such a project. The decision to proceed further will be informed by the outcome of the pre-development phase.



The costs eligible for Preparatory Technical Support can include:-

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

As with all projects, these costs must occur after the Letter of Offer/Contract is signed.

Preparatory Technical Support projects will be reimbursed at 100% up to the maximum grant allocated in Northern Ireland (£5,000) and Ireland (€6,000) per LAG.

Phase Three – Full Cooperation Project



Phase three involves the implementation of a concrete joint project with clearly defined deliverables producing benefits for all of the participating areas. Cooperation projects typically benefit from the complementarity of the approach in different LAG areas and/or through achieving the critical mass required for a project to be viable.

The project should be managed under a Coordinating / Lead LAG that must be identified at the application stage. In all types of Cooperation projects, partners must pre-define/agree the key criteria related to the activities to be selected and carried out. 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 as set out in the application and any subsequent agreed Letter of Offer/Contract.

Full Cooperation projects will be reimbursed at agreed LEADER rates¹ up to the maximum grant allocated in Northern Ireland (£400,000) and Ireland (€200,000) per LAG.

¹ Please refer to Northern Ireland and Ireland Guidance

Qualifying Criteria

The qualifying criteria for Cooperation projects are as follows:-

- ✓ The Cooperation action **must** involve at least one LEADER LAG implementing a Local Development Strategy in (Northern Ireland) (Ireland)
- ✓ 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 project



A Cooperation project partner of a LEADER LAG which is not another LAG must be a "**group of local public and private partners that is implementing a local development strategy**". This means that the scope of action of this group has to be similar to that of a LAG.

Partners

The **direct partners** of a LAG for Cooperation projects may be:-

- ✓ Another LAG
- ✓ A group of local public and private partners in a rural territory that is implementing a local development strategy within or outside the European Union
- ✓ A group of local public and private partners in a non-rural territory that is implementing a local development strategy

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.

LAG led Cooperation projects may also involve **associate partners**. Please refer to the  separate Guidance of this toolkit for information relating to associate partners in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Common Costs

Common costs are those incurred and jointly shared among partners in the Cooperation project. The table below lists examples of Eligible Common Costs as agreed by Northern Ireland and Ireland:-

Cost type	Eligible Cost	Additional Information
Common Costs	Concepts, planning and certification expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparatory activity: expenses relating to conception and development of the project; general expenses relating to the organisation and coordination of planning and pre-development activities
	Interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparatory and Cooperation activity
	Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparatory and Cooperation activity: partner search
	Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development, elaboration & implementation
	Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feasibility studies, research, specific consultancies and associated activities
	External consultants, additional staff, coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best practice exchange, including the recourse (labour contracts) to third parties for research, evaluation and the transfer of experience
	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training/dissemination among members of participating LAGs Training module development and introductory/pilot training of beneficiaries
	Project information & communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public relations - promotional material (flyer, leaflets, guides, websites), events, other Investments in equipment for communication
	Running a common structure/network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expenses relating to the constitution and running of a common structure



LAGs sharing common costs must ensure that a single invoice is forwarded to one Lead LAG who will take responsibility for payment and subsequent invoicing of partner LAGs to recoup their respective contributions.