



LEADER 2014-2020 Co-Operation Projects

2016

Table of contents

1. Background	2
2. Approach to co-operation	2
3. Types of support	3
3.1 Phase one – Networking	3
3.2 Phase two – Preparatory co-operation project (pre development phase)	3
3.3 Phase three – The co-operation project (implementation of the concrete project)	4
3.4 Administration and animation costs	5
4. Eligibility Conditions – General Principles	5
4.1 Geographical Scope	5
4.2 Primary Eligibility Criteria	5
4.3 Scope of co-operation projects	6
4.4 Eligibility of common and local costs	8
5. Co-operation Agreement	9
5.1 The co-operation contract and letter of offer/contract	9
5.2 Agreement for pre-development activities	9
5.3 The co-operation agreement set objectives	10
5.4 The co-operation agreement content	10
6. Application Process	10
6.1 Phase 2 projects	10
6.2 Phase 3 projects	10
6.3 Selection by the Department	10
7. Management process	11
8. Letter of offer	11
Annex1: Co-operation project process flow	12
Annex 2: Preparatory technical support – Generic Template	13

Co-operation Projects

1. Background

A Co-operation project is one which takes place as a joint action between two or more LAGs and which provides mutual benefit for each partner – there must be at least 2 partners in respect of any grant aided activity. While the co-operation project is a partnership between two or more LAGs, the beneficiary of funding (project promoter) can also be private or community based applicants (or an implementing partner) in the same manner as for general LEADER support that does not involve co-operation. The processes are outlined in diagrammatic form in Annex 1.

Co-operation of a LAG area with other geographical areas is a key component of the LEADER methodology and enhances the innovative character of local development by combining knowledge, skills and experience in thematic areas common to the strategies of each participating LAG area. Co-operation projects must demonstrate genuine added value for the areas concerned. The key drivers of co-operation projects will often be –

- the need to achieve the critical mass required for a joint project to be viable;
- encouraging complementary actions; and
- the pooling of know-how or human and financial resources.

LEADER will support transnational [with areas outside of Ireland] and inter-territorial [with other areas in Ireland] co-operation projects carried out by LAGs in line with the objectives of their local development strategies. Funding will be available for transnational co-operation projects involving partners in EU Member States, EU candidate states and EEA states. Projects outside of these areas may also be eligible for funding subject to prior approval by the Department. Co-operation projects between LEADER LAGs and non-LEADER Groups may also be eligible for funding where the proposed project is led and co-ordinated by the LEADER LAG, and the non-LEADER group is implementing a local development strategy.

A national allocation of €10m is ring-fenced for trans-national and inter-territorial co-operation projects. Funding will be allocated by the Department to local action groups for co-operation projects on the basis of an open call to all LAGs, which may also involve targeted calls under specific themes as the need arises. The requirements of the LEADER Operating Rules apply (e.g. expression of interest, project assessment, selection, payment claims etc.) except where specific procedures are outlined in this document.

2. Approach to co-operation

Co-operation projects must:

- Address themes and objectives that are important for the participating groups and their rural areas i.e. the themes and objectives identified of the strategies of the LAGs based in Ireland;

- 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 co-operating 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.

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. This guide may be downloaded from:

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

3. Types of Support

Co-operation activities take time to identify, plan, implement and manage, and are developed in an iterative process as reflected by the three stages identified below. LAGs are encouraged to engage with other public and private bodies that may be able to assist in the development and implementation of co-operation projects e.g. educational institutions, tourism bodies or other development agencies. The three phases of a co-operation project are as follows:

3.1. 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 co-operation 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 and is not a separate project under the Programme.

3.2. Phase Two - Preparatory Technical Project (Pre-Development phase)

Phase two precedes the full co-operation project and allows LAGs and other project promoters to investigate the merit and potential to develop concrete actions that could form a full co-operation project. A Pre-Development project could involve a feasibility study, market analysis and / or elaboration of the common issues that contribute towards a series of actions of mutual benefit to all of the LAG areas involved. This type of project, by its nature, will inform whether or not a full co-operation project should proceed, although it is not mandatory to undergo preparatory technical project in advance of a full co-operation project.

Support for a preparatory technical project (Pre-Development Phase) is contingent on all of the LAGs and other project promoters involved in the project demonstrating that they are envisaging the implementation of a full co-operation project. The Pre-Development project 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 include:

- costs related to exchange of experience (e.g. meetings with potential partners, travel, accommodation, and interpreter's fees) that are specific to the project.
- 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.

The maximum grant amount per preparatory technical project is €6,000 per LAG and the costs incurred may be reimbursed at a rate of up to 100%. Funding can only commence where all elements of the co-operation projects have been approved by all the respective LAG partners. Funding cannot be provided for any element of a preparatory co-operation project once an agreement for a full co-operation project has been completed i.e. it must precede the co-operation project. A standard preparatory technical support application form is included at Annex 1.

The costs associated with preparatory technical support will be paid from the €10 million allocation and will not be deducted from the LAGs LEADER allocation. All claims for preparatory technical support must be submitted together (i.e. no phased payments) and payment will only be made where accompanied by an end of project report describing the engagement undertaken, the issues addressed, any research/analysis undertaken, the outcome of the project and lessons learned for future co-operation.

3.3. Phase Three - the Co-operation project (Implementation of the concrete project)

Phase three involves the implementation of a concrete joint project with clearly defined deliverables producing benefits for all of the participating areas. Co-operation 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. Projects can be focused on a broad range of actions such as capacity building, common publications or physical investment.

The project is managed under a coordinating/lead LAG that must be identified at the application stage. In all types of co-operation projects, partners (including non-LAG project promoters) must pre-define/agree the key criteria related to the activities to be selected and carried out. It is also important that the co-operation partners (including non-LAG project promoters) 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 letter of offer/contract.

The maximum grant amount per co-operation project is €200,000 per LAG and costs incurred may be reimbursed at the same rate as applies for all LEADER projects. The normal LEADER rules as regards matching funding and contributions in

kind apply. The final payment for a full co-operation project will only be made where accompanied by an end of project report briefly describing the engagement undertaken, the issues addressed, any research/analysis if undertaken, the outcome of the project and lessons learned for future co-operation. This report should be provided regardless of the type of investment carried out.

3.4 Administration and Animation costs

The administration and animation budget ascribed to the Local Development Strategy of the LAG will be increased by an amount equal to 25% of the grant amount approved for the co-operation project within each LAG for phase 3 projects only subject to the overall administration and animation budget not exceeding 25% of the LDS expenditure over the duration of the programme (see examples below).

Example A – Proposed project eligible for 75% grant funding to be funded on a 50/50 basis by each LAG

Total cost of Project	€200,000
Funding request to each LAG	€100,000
Grant amount approved	€ 75,000
Administration & Animation amount for each LAG	€ 18,750

Example B – Proposed project eligible for 50% funding to be funded on a 50/50 basis by each LAG

Total cost of Project	€200,000
Funding request to each LAG	€100,000
Grant amount approved	€ 50,000
Administration & Animation amount for each LAG	€ 12,500

4. Eligibility Conditions – General Principles

While the co-operation project is a partnership between two or more LAGs, the beneficiary of funding (project promoter) can also be private or community based applicants (or an implementing partner) in the same manner as for general LEADER support that does not involve co-operation. The processes are outlined in diagrammatic form in Annex 1.

4.1. Geographical Scope

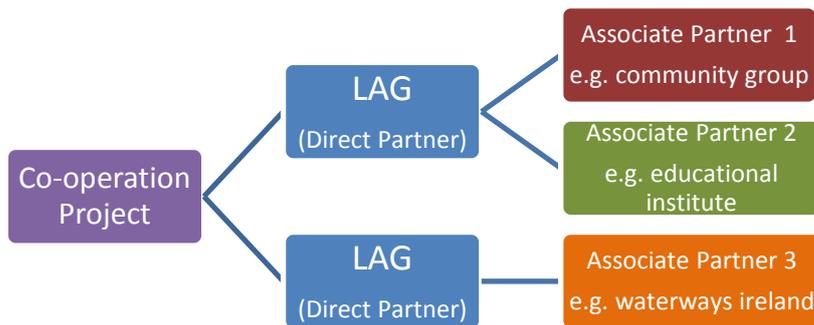
The direct partners of a Local Action Group for co-operation projects may be:

- another Local Action group;

- 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.

LAG-led Co-operation projects may involve *associate partners* from within the relevant LAG's territory that may be private promoters, community groups or public bodies. The requirements of Article 70 of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 apply as regards the location of any investment.

Example of potential relationship between Direct and Associate Partners



4.2. Primary Eligibility Criteria

The qualifying criteria for co-operation projects are as follows:

- The co-operation action must involve at least one LAG implementing a Local Development Strategy in Ireland and another partner being a LAG or group as described in section 4.1;
- It must be implemented under the responsibility of a lead co-ordinating LAG;
- It must set out actions and outcomes with clear plans for dissemination of the results;
- It must involve the implementation of a concrete, joint action.

A co-operation 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.

4.3. Scope of co-operation projects

As with all LEADER projects, the co-operation project must be in line with the LEADER themes outlined in the LEADER Operating Rules and the objectives set out in the LAG Local Development Strategy, and must be to the benefit of the region covered by the respective LDS. Applications should be preceded by an expression of interest in the same manner as all other projects.

Examples of co-operation projects include:

- Assisting local industry in targeting new markets;
- Improving the quality of products manufactured by co-operating in relation to processing techniques;
- Joint marketing and short supply chain activities;
- Introducing new approaches in areas such as town and village renewal, rural tourism or environmental management by building on the experience of LAGs in other areas,
- Providing economies of scale or critical mass to enable a project which would not have been possible within a single LAG area.

Co-operation projects that include elements of knowledge transfer / training-type activity must take account of the following principles:

- support shall not include courses of instruction or training which form part of normal education programmes or systems at secondary or higher levels;
- support shall not include courses of instruction or training that involve the potential award of a qualification;
- the activity must be based upon the transfer of knowledge and skills from one partner region to another, or across the projects combined area on a common theme;
- the activity must result in measureable added value for the area and not replace or compete with similar provisions already in existence in the area.

In addition, LEADER funding cannot be used to cover the cost of attendance at formal training events even where funding to attend is not available from any other mainstream source.

The level of co-operation funding provided for knowledge transfer / training type activities will be carefully monitored to ensure that it delivers added value over and above what could be achieved without co-operation and it does not account for a disproportionate amount of the available budget. This will be factored into the selection of co-operation projects by DAHRRGA.

4.4. Eligibility of Common and Local Costs

Common costs are those incurred and jointly shared among partners in the co-operation project. Local costs are incurred by for activities that directly relate to the costs of the co-operation project in each LAG area and the cost is not shared with other LAGs.

The table below lists examples of Common and Local Costs

Cost type	Eligible Cost	Examples
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 Co-operation activity
	Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparatory and Co-operation activity:
	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, coaching,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best practice exchange, including the recourse 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
	Managing the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expenses of the lead partner LAG for coordination activities, monitoring and evaluation of the project, if and as agreed by partners, not including salaries.
Running a common structure / network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expenses relating to the constitution and running of a common structure 	
Local Costs	Construction costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs associated with the building / creation of a tangible, fixed asset
	Office equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchase of telephone and computer services
	Travel & accommodation where this is integral to the delivery of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International & local travel expenses in line with the conditions of, and up to the level of, the prevailing Civil Service rates only
	Seminars, Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room rental for joint meetings (note: if meetings are related to coordination, these can be considered common costs) Preparatory activity: partner search – study visits and associated activities
	Organising meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination of partner meetings including travel costs (note: if meetings are related to coordination, these can be considered common costs), board and accommodation, local transport, mission allowance, hire of premises and equipment Preparatory activity: partner search – including the hire of premises, equipment & catering Catering costs are only eligible for meetings between co-operation partners and can only cover the following; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Tea & Coffee up to a maximum of €5 per person ➤ Lunch up to a maximum of €10 per person

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.

5. Co-operation Agreement

With a view to ensuring effective project management, it is important at the outset to clarify:

- the goals to be achieved;
- the roles and responsibilities (for management, co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation); and
- the financial contributions of each partner.

5.1. All groups engaging in (full scale) co-operation projects must enter into a legally binding, written Co-operation Agreement with all partners before commencement of the project. The Co-operation Agreement is separate from the letter of offer/contract.

5.2. A formal, written Co-operation Agreement is not required for Pre-Development activities as the application form in Annex 2 is sufficient to outline the proposed budget and activities, and this will be confirmed in the letter of offer/contract. However LAGs may, if they wish, develop a Memorandum of Understanding (or similar) to record the role of involved partners, the common objectives of the Pre-Development activity and how costs will be shared and paid.

5.3. The Co-operation Agreement must be signed by all the partners and must set out:

- the project goals (inputs; outputs; and impacts);
- the actions that will be implemented to attain them;
- the role of each partner in carrying out the project;
- the financial participation of each partner in the project; and
- all components of the whole budget for the joint initiative.

5.4. At a minimum, the Co-operation Agreement must contain:

- a written undertaking by the partners with the names and addresses of the Lead Local Action Group and of the direct partner LAGs/local groups and associate partners involved;
- a detailed description of the co-operation project indicating:
 - how the need/demand for the project was identified;
 - the project goals;
 - the activities that will be taken to achieve them;

- the role of each partner in organising and implementing the project;
- the arrangements for organising, monitoring and evaluating the project;
- the expected results of the project;
- an overall planned budget and the financial participation of each partner;
- a timetabled project implementation and management plan;
- procedures for amending the Agreement.

6. Application Process

Pre-development and full co-operation project applications must be assessed and selected separately by each Local Action Group involved before being submitted to the Department for final approval.

Phase 2 projects

Pre-development projects must go through the normal evaluation and selection process within each LAG, before being submitted to the Department for final approval. The application form for pre-development projects must be accompanied by the technical support template provided in Annex 2.

The application form must go through the normal evaluation and selection process in each partner LAG. The application will only undergo one Article 48 administrative check, which should take place prior to submission of the selected project to the Department.

A letter of offer/contract must issue in respect of each LAG.

Phase 3 projects

Full co-operation projects must go through the normal evaluation and selection process (and Article 48 administrative checks) separately within each partner LAG before being submitted to the Department for final approval.

Where the co-operation project is being delivered by the LAG or implementing partner (in-house projects), the LAG must ensure an appropriate segregation of duties between –

- staff involved in the project application and delivery elements; and,
- the staff involved in project evaluation and administration processes.

Selection by the Department

The co-operation project selected by the LAG must be forwarded to the Department for final approval. In providing the final approval, the Department will consider the available budget, the strategic role of the project vis a vis the objectives of the local development strategy concerned, the type of co-operation activity and the level of funding to be provided subject to the maximum levels outlined above. Applications should be forwarded to rdp1420 inbox.

For transnational co-operation projects, all approvals for Pre-Development and Co-operation projects will be made conditional upon the other parties also gaining approval from their Managing Authorities / Funders and will be valid for 9 months.

The Department will inform the European Commission of all approved transnational Co-operation projects.

7. Management process

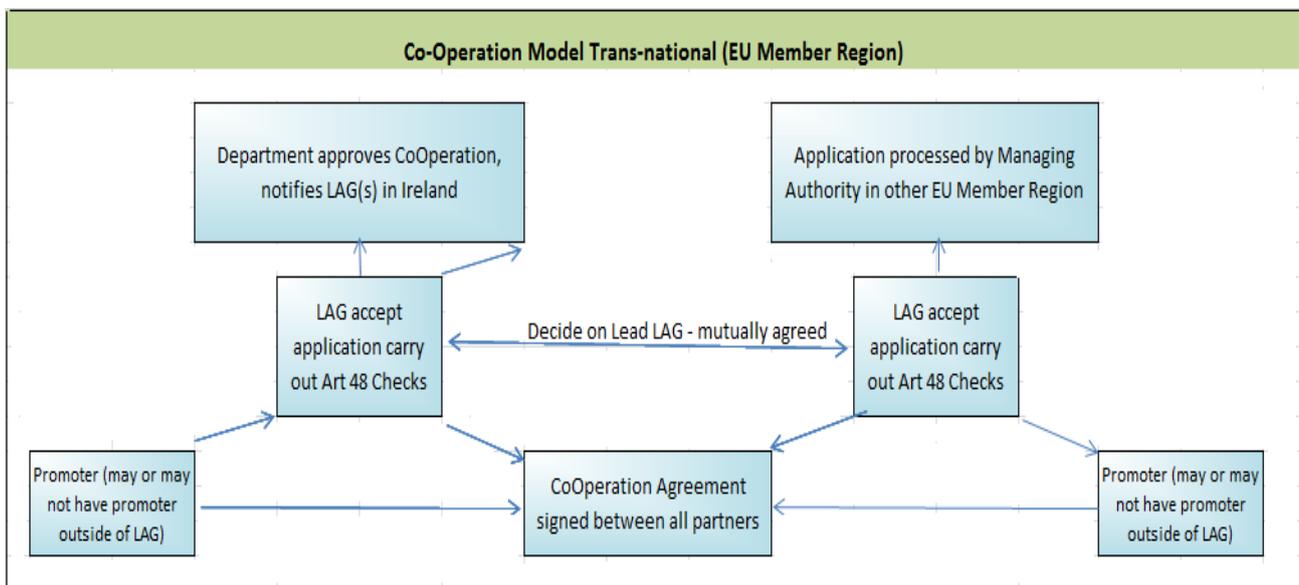
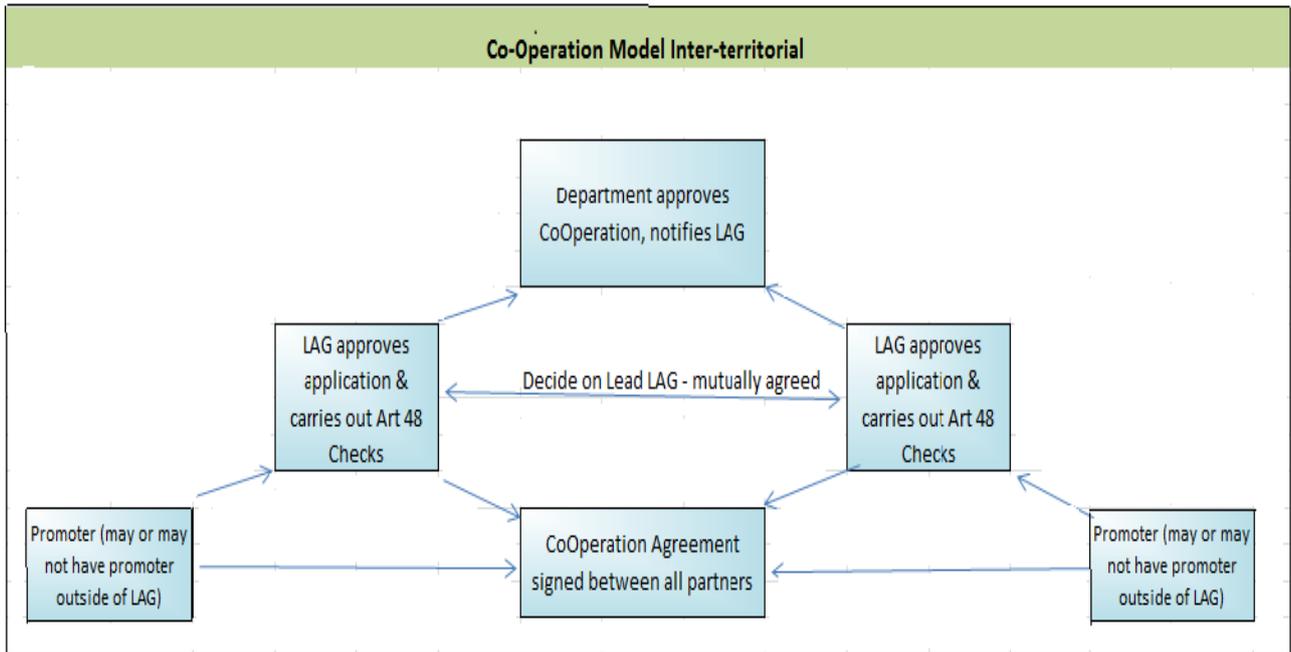
The designated LEAD LAG must provide a formal undertaking in writing that they will be responsible for co-ordinating the project. The Lead LAG should ensure that a consistent approach is adopted across all participating LAGS, including the use of the same terminology (e.g. name of project), the same project description, application details etc. Each participating LAG is responsible for the component of the project in their own area and each component is recorded as a unique project on the LEADER IT system, with the other components cross-referenced. Likewise, each LAG makes separate payment claims in respect of their own project component. Claims for payment, together with invoices, receipts and supporting documents, should in the first instance be submitted to the Lead LAG to complete its administrative checks. The Lead LAG pays its portion of the grant aid to the beneficiary on the eligible expenditure established. All this documentation can then be copied to the partner LAGs to process their element of the grant aid.

The participant LAGs should evaluate the project separately and without reference to the evaluation minutes of other LAGs and must advise the LEAD LAG of their Boards' decisions. A formal letter of offer should issue from each LAG and the IT system updated accordingly.

8. Letter of Offer

Where approval has been received from the Department, the letter of offer must issue from each LAG involved in the co-operation project and each LAG retains responsibility for delivery of the project in the same manner as for all other projects. A letter of offer/contract must issue for both the preparatory technical support (phase 2 projects) and the full co-operation project (phase 3 project).

Annex 1: Co-operation project process flow



Annex 2: Preparatory technical Support – Generic Template

Working Title of proposed project

Contact Details for Local Action Group submitting this template	
Name of Local Action Group (LAG):	
Name of Chairperson:	
Name of main contact for this form:	
E-mail address:	
Telephone number:	
Postal address:	

Description of the Preparatory Technical Support project
<p>1. Brief description of the potential project for which Preparatory Technical Support is being sought. (around 250 words). This should include how the project links in with the priorities in your LDS and other relevant priorities and a timetable for the work.</p>
<p>2. Who has been identified as potential partner(s)* and what value do they add to the potential project? (*please identify by region/country)</p>
<p>3. What networking activity has already taken place with this/these potential partner(s) in association with this potential project? Attach evidence (e.g.</p>

copies of e-mails or minutes of meetings). Please summarise the outcomes and progress to date.

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4. (i) What do you expect preparatory support to achieve and (ii) what are the desired outcomes for the Local Action Group area from the potential Co-operation project – including the concrete project proposal which might ultimately result from the co-operation ?

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5. Explain why the proposed project is likely to be achievable if undertaken as a joint Cooperation action as opposed to a regular project?

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Partners

Does the LAG see the opportunity to involve other partners?	YES	NO
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Proposed Budget for Preparatory Technical Support project

Anticipated Activities	Brief Description	Cost (€)		
		Applicant LAG	Partner LAG(s)	Overall
Studies / Consultancy				
Product Development				
Travel / Subsistence				
Meetings / Hospitality				
Other <i>(please detail)</i>				
Total Costs				

