

Existing and New Council Chief Executives

Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast BT4 3SB
Tel: 028 90 524 597
Date: 15 October 2014

Dear Chief Executive,

Re: LOCAL ACTION GROUP (LAG) FORMATION 2014:2020

You will know through your Strategic Forum representatives and from minutes of the forum, that DARD has for some time been consulting with the Rural Network and Cluster Networking Group to develop guidelines for the formation and operation of new LAG's.

As part of the LAG formation, *communications strategy and to assist with building momentum towards the 2014/20 NIRD, I am writing to bring you up to date with progress so far. A timeframe for LAG animation, application and appointment has been established, please see table below:-

TASK	TARGET DATE
Form local facilitation group's	Immediately
Hold regional sectoral event	5 November 2014
Animation events	5 November – 11 December 2014
Agree LAG membership and complete registration forms	19 December 2014
LAG membership event	Early January 2015
Selection of social partner LAG board by LAG members	16 January 2015
Receive nominations of councillors for LAG board	16 January 2015
Appoint of LAG by DARD to draft interim local rural strategies	30 January 2015



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An Roinn Talmhaíochta agus Forbartha Tuaithe
Männystrie o Fairms an Kintra Fordèrin

The LAG formation process will be formally launched by the Minister shortly and this will be followed by a stakeholder event planned for 5th November in Loughry (invitations will issue shortly). This is a one off event, aimed at informing stakeholders and opinion formers of the timeframes and processes of LAG selection and the required shape and structure required of New LAG's. The event will set out the opportunities, challenges and rewards to be experienced in LAG engagement through input from current LAG members and beneficiaries.

The new LAG model remains true to the principles of LEADER and the bottom up approach. Building on the successes of the LEADER method of community led local development (CLLD) the new LAG's will seek to increase community ownership of the Local Rural Strategies and it's delivery through project actions. This will be achieved through the formation of a wider LAG membership from which a LAG Board will be locally appointed. The LAG Board in compliance with EU regulations will be comprised of social partners appointed as part of the wider LAG membership and nominated public (elected) representatives (appointed by councils).

New for this programme is the Commission's stipulation that *'no one single interest group shall represent more than 49% of the voting rights'*. In effect this means that public sector representatives (considered as a single group) must not exceed 49% of the makeup of the LAG Board. Equally no one single social partner group could occupy more than 49% i.e. farming, community or business. It also means that public sector representation, defined in this case as elected representatives, is a requirement. In this new programme, the new council community plans will also be important in framing the LAG strategies and the priority 6 funding.

The November event, essentially the first stage (phase 1) of the LAG appointment process, will focus on gaining the support of regional, sub-regional and umbrella organisations with a rural reach, to mobilise local interest in forming a wider LAG membership from which the social partner representation will be agreed. Enclosed is an information sheet (Annex A) providing more details on LAG Membership and one on the LAG Board (Annex B).

Operationally DARD will manage the process working with the Rural Network and involving the Rural Support Networks. The process will be supported by the establishment of a 'local facilitation group'. This group will be key to the success of the process and will be comprised of volunteers drawn from the current LAG's. It will act as an information conduit helping to ensure that the public consultation process is local, relevant and inclusive. As eventually LAG strategies will be delivering in line with Council Community plans, the participation of Council representatives in these facilitation groups is critically important. This is especially true both at the formation stages and for the nomination of existing LAG members to the group (Terms of Reference attached Annex C). Not all new Councils have direct interface with a current Admin Units and therefore this may require some support. In such cases I would ask that a designated Council contact be established and advised to myself and the Rural Network.

It is difficult to get people out to public meetings particularly as the nights are drawing in, and I am aware that presently many Councils have public consultation exercises underway in relation to corporate or community planning I would not wish to see LAG formation events or activities clash with Council managed consultations. Rather it would be helpful to achieve complementarity perhaps through shared dates or venues. In this respect I would

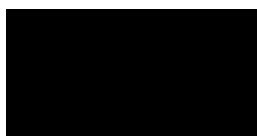
encourage timely liaison/planning action between the local facilitation group' and council officials.

It is important of course that new rural development money gets on to the ground as soon as possible and in this regard DARD is working to a target date of the end of December 2014 to have LAG Membership in place and the end of January 2015 to have LAG's appointed. These are challenging but I hope achievable targets. I realise there are many competing demands on Councillors and Council Officials with the transitions now taking place and for those involved in NIRD 2007-13 with the programme run out. However I would seek your support and co-operation with the processes of LAG formation which ultimately aims to ensure a smoother and speedier run in to the new programme than we have previously achieved. This aim, I know you will agree, can only benefit your local businesses, communities and as appropriate constituents.

Can I take this opportunity to thank you for your contribution to rural development under the current programme and to thank you in advance in anticipation of your co-operation in implementing the necessary structures for the incoming programme.

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



Gareth Evans
Implementation Manager

Copied to:
RDP Managers (Lead Councils)
LAGs
JCCs

NB* The RNNI will put in place a fortnightly update in the form of a short newsletter which will be issued to existing Lead and new Council Chief Executives, RDP Admin Units, DARD and Rural Support Networks and invite you to share as necessary in helping to ensure good communications are maintained throughout the process.

INFORMATION SHEET 1

WHAT ARE LOCAL ACTION GROUPS (LAGS)?

New Local Action Groups (LAGs) are being formed to deliver the LEADER element of the new Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020.

In order to ensure full representation of local opinion, membership of each LAG will be unlimited and will be open to anyone aged 18 or over interested in improving their local area and community. From this membership a LAG Board will be drawn which will also comprise of a mix of appointed and elected representatives.

The LAG Board will be established as a company limited by guarantee and will be responsible for the design and implementation of a Local Development Strategy. The LAG Board is the decision making body responsible for agreeing the operations of their associated LAG.

This Factsheet provides information on becoming a LAG Member.

A separate Factsheet is available on becoming a LAG Board Member.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A LAG MEMBER?

The primary role of a LAG Member is to take an active and interested role in the development of their local area and community; to contribute to the design of a local development strategy and to establish the social partner representation within the LAG Board.

Social partner representation means that the interests of the local community have a place within the Board; this can be achieved through the participation of nominated organisations that represent specific sectors or interest groups in society, for example, those working with or representing the interests of community groups, farmers, local business, young people, women or those with disabilities. It also includes members of the wider community who may stand for election to the Board as individuals. Social partners will represent 51% of the Board.

By becoming a LAG Member you will have an input to the Board composition. The Board will be formed through a combination of appointed and elected positions, which will be agreed during the LAG formation process.

Those seats to be filled by public representation and specific sector/interest groups will be by appointment and the remaining social partner seats will be elected by LAG Members. Only those registered as LAG Members can stand for election to the LAG Board. The Board will have defined terms of office that actively seeks, promotes and encourages new membership by rotation.

LAG Members, in addition to standing for election to the Board, can also contribute to the work of the Board by engaging in thematic activities, working groups or panels. Members will also be able to participate in a range of training and networking events, and depending on your level of involvement some training will be compulsory.

HOW MANY MEMBERS WILL IT HAVE?

The LAG will draw its membership from the community within its area and anyone aged 18 or over can become a Member; there is no restriction on membership or on the number of members a LAG can have. Anyone wishing to join their LAG should

attend their local public information events and complete a Registration Form. Registration Forms will also be made available online at www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk

REPORTING & ACCOUNTABILITY

The LAG Board is responsible to its members and should report to LAG Members through at least 2 LAG meetings per year, annual reports and newsletters. The LAG Board may also organise specific thematic events, consultations or strategic reviews with its LAG membership. LAG Members may also if required call their own meetings from time to time.

INFORMATION SHEET 2

WHAT IS THE LOCAL ACTION GROUP (LAG) BOARD?

The **Local Action Group Board** is a group of appointed and elected members who are responsible for the design and implementation of a Local Development Strategy for their area. It is the decision making body of the partnership and is responsible for agreeing the operations of the LAG such as opening calls for applications, assessing applications and taking decisions on which projects to support. It is also responsible for overseeing staff and monitoring the implementation of the Strategy.

**This factsheet provides information on becoming a LAG Board Member.
A separate factsheet is available on becoming a LAG Member.**

HOW MANY MEMBERS WILL IT HAVE?

The size of the Board may vary depending on size of LAG area however to be effective it is recommended that the Board should comprise of between 12-18 members.

HOW IS THIS BOARD MADE UP?

The LAG Board should be representative of the Strategy area. The Board composition should address equality of opportunity and promotion of good relations. The operation of LAGs is set out in the EU Common Provisions Regulation. This stipulates among other things that *'no one single interest group shall represent more than 49% of the voting rights'*. This means public sector representatives (considered as a single group) must not exceed 49% of the makeup of the LAG Board. Equally no one single social partner group could occupy more than 49% i.e. farming, community or business.

Social partners that are represented on the Board will be those that have been identified as part of the LAG formation process, and are chosen to provide a balanced and representative Board. The exact composition of individual Boards may therefore vary depending on local circumstance.

Those seats to be filled by elected representatives and specific sector/interest groups will be by appointment. Remaining seats will be filled by election from the LAG Membership (*for information on LAG Membership refer to Information Sheet 1*).

The Board will have defined terms of office that actively seeks, promotes and encourages new membership by rotation.

WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR BECOMING A LAG BOARD MEMBER?

The LAG will look for individuals who;

- Are already members of the wider LAG membership
- Live / work or can demonstrate a contribution to the LAG area
- Have an understanding of and commitment to addressing the needs of the area
- Demonstrates an understanding of LEADER and the Local Development Strategy
- Are able to commit to the required number of meetings, preparation, travel, etc that are necessary

- Are willing to make a full contribution to Board meetings and to the workings of the LAG in general
- Will act as a champion for the LEADER programme and the area

Skills and experience relevant to the delivery of Local Development Strategies would also be an advantage.

LAG BOARD COMMITMENTS

The full LAG Board will meet between 6-9 times per year depending on business. Board members will also be invited to participate in additional thematic working groups or other panels as determined by the Board. Board members will also be asked to contribute to the development of co-operation projects which can enhance the delivery of the Local Development Strategy.

All Board members will be responsible for preparing for meetings appropriately by reading any briefing papers, project recommendations or proposals in advance.

Members will be invited to participate in training and networking activities on behalf of the LAG as a member of the Rural Network for Northern Ireland.

Each LAG Board will form a Company Limited by Guarantee and each Board member shall assume responsibilities as a Director of the Company.

HOW DO I BECOME AN ELECTED MEMBER OF THE LAG BOARD?

You must complete the Nomination Form and have your Nomination supported by 2 members of the LAG membership. You should make sure that you can meet the criteria and time commitments required. Your Nomination Paper shall then be verified by an independent panel before the Election Ballot is drawn up.

The independent panel do not assess applications for Board Membership. This is a bottom up approach and LAG members will determine its Board. The independent panel will verify that the process has been followed, forms are submitted on time and are fully completed.

Information regarding the Election Process is contained in Information Sheet 3.

Annex C

LEADER FORMATION FACILITATION GROUP: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

The Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 is in the final stages of planning.

With the reform of local government, the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the LEADER approach presents real opportunity to engage local people in Community Led Local Development (CLLD) aligned to new Council boundaries and in support of future community planning processes.

This inevitably means change to the current operations. This new start means that each eligible area now needs to form a partnership which will take on the role of the LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) and develop a Strategy for its area which then acts as the basis for distributing the funds.

The animation process of forming new LAGs and developing Local Development Strategies for this new programme is currently beginning and as part of this process, each potential LEADER area is invited to set up a local **Facilitation Group** to assist and support the process ensuring the bottom up approach is embedded at every stage of the development cycle.

Rationale for the Facilitation Group

Each potential new LEADER area will be invited to establish a Facilitation Group to provide local direction to this transitional phase into the new programme. The establishment of this group will act as the initial mechanism for bringing local people together that will result in the formation of a new LEADER Local Action Group.

The Facilitation Group will provide the means to retain the experience gained from members of existing LEADER groups and combine this with the input of additional key local stakeholders in directing the formation process needed to set up a new LAG in line with current guidance.

Aims of the Facilitation Group

To work with agreed facilitator(s) (Rural Network Supports) to co-ordinate a local engagement & communication plan to establish a new LEADER Local Action Group for the area;

- To develop and agree a Local Engagement & Communication Plan for the catchment area
- To identify key local stakeholder groups
- To target particular under-represented groups in the area
- To undertake as part of public awareness an initial SWOT and Issues Prioritisation exercise
- To support the creation of the wider LAG group
- To agree an independent panel to assist the verification process of the LAG Board

Membership

In order to provide an effective balance between representation and direction it is recommended that the Group should comprise of 8-10 members, consisting of and/ or engaging with;

- Members of the outgoing Local Action Group (s) for the area (50%)
- Under-represented groups, e.g. youth, unemployed, women, disabled or any other sectors/groups that are recognised as under-represented in the area
- Local business representation
- New local government representation
- Other key stakeholders identified by the group

Duration

The Group is established to fulfill a specific time bound role within the wider LAG and Local Development Strategy (LDS) development process; it ceases once the wider LAG is established and its initial membership signed up.

This process should take approximately 3 months, and be complete by the end of 2014. It is expected that the Group may be required to meet 2-3 times during this process. All meetings will be agreed in advance with the Group and every effort made to accommodate member requirements.

Meetings

1. In order to maintain a consistent and effective approach to achieving the Group's outputs it is expected that all Members attend all scheduled meetings and workshops.
2. The facilitation team will provide full administrative / secretariat support. The facilitation team will be responsible for issuing the schedule of dates and for making arrangements for all meetings and workshops in agreement with the Group.
3. Members of the Group will be invited to take part in the wider process/capacity building activities provided.