LEADER
Community-Led Local Development

National Rural Network

LEADER Newsletter
No. 4: December 2019
A Focus on the LEADER Programme 2014-2020

CONTENTS

LEADER Programme 2014-2020 Update

Welcome to the National Rural Network's fourth LEADER newsletter focusing on issues relating to the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme. As it stands at the end of November 2019, there are 2,667 projects approved with a value of €98.7m, an increase of €47.1 million on the 2018 figures. When the 382 applications that are currently in the middle of the approval process are factored in this figure increases by €32.8m. In addition, almost €40.7m has already been drawn down in funding for these projects, compared to just €11m at the same time in 2018. A total of 1,000 projects are through the process and fully complete. This means that 58.9% of the total budget has been approved so far by the Local Action Groups (LAGs) in the current programme. To break this down even further this approval rate comprises 57.6% of the Core LEADER project allocation, 14.6% of Co-operation projects and 11.8% of the LEADER Food Initiative projects.

The highest number of the Core LEADER project approvals remain in the rural tourism and the basic services targeted at hard to reach communities sub themes, with enterprise development and rural towns following behind. Under theme 3 'Rural Environment', Protection and Improvement of Local Biodiversity projects are the most prominent type of project at the end of 2019. When we look at LEADER Co-operation projects this story is somewhat similar with theme 1 and rural tourism and enterprise development being the most prominent. Further to this, basic services targeted at hard to reach communities and Water resources also feature, however, at a somewhat lower rate. Unsurprisingly, within the Food Initiative strand, enterprise development features the strongest. Collectively, all these projects have impacted on 851 communities across Ireland in various ways.

Activity under the Programme has increased substantially in 2019. As well as the significant rise in project approvals, the level of funding drawn down by project promoters has also increased. Over €40 million has now been paid to over 1,000 project promoters, with over €27 million of this being paid out in 2019 alone. €5 million in funding previously earmarked for a REDZ measure under the LEADER Programme was recently allocated to the top 10 performing LAGs who were most advanced in the delivery of the programme in their respective areas. The selection criteria was based on the percentage of project funding allocated to promoters and the amount drawn down by the promoters on 20th September 2019.

The successful LAGs who all received an additional €500,000 are:

- Kerry LAG;
- Mayo LAG;
- Waterford LAG;
- Limerick LAG;
- Cork North LAG;
- Donegal LAG;
- Tipperary LAG;
- Offaly LAG;
- Leitrim LAG;
- Cavan LAG;

The LEADER Concept

The LEADER programme, established by the European Commission in 1991, is based on the 'bottom-up' approach. A European Commission report entitled 'The LEADER Approach – A basic guide', represents the rationale behind LEADER in the following manner: 'the main concept behind the LEADER initiative is that, given the diversity of European rural areas, development strategies are more effective and efficient if decided and implemented at local level by local actors, accompanied by clear and transparent procedures, the support of the relevant public administrations and the necessary technical assistance for the transfer of good practice' (European Commission, 2006, p.8).

The current LEADER budget allocated to Ireland, funded through Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP), provides €250 million in financial aid to promote social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural communities, up to the year 2020.

7 Key Principles of LEADER

The LEADER approach is based on 7 key principles – all of which must collaborate and positively interact for it to be successful. Indeed, it is important to consider these 7 principles as a toolkit, rather than as separate entities, that can work together to safeguard and build a brighter future for rural communities.

A detailed description of these 7 key principles of LEADER can be found here:
https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/publi/fact/leader/2006_en.pdf

Process and Practicalities: The LEADER Approach Explained

The LEADER Programme provides funding to support community-led rural development. We explore how the LEADER funding process works in practice providing an overview of the main stages and requirements when making an application.

Some basics: Where to apply and project types supported

### Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners (IPs)

Decisions on LEADER funding applications are made at a local level by a network of 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs). They approve applications that align with the objectives of their Local Development Strategy, which is developed in consultation with the local communities. Local Development Companies in each area are responsible for the day to day management and co-ordination of the LEADER Programme, either as Implementing Partners (IPs) in a wider LAG or by acting as the LAG itself. Applications for LEADER funding are made to these Local Development Companies. Project Officers within these companies are the first port of call when thinking about applying for LEADER funding.
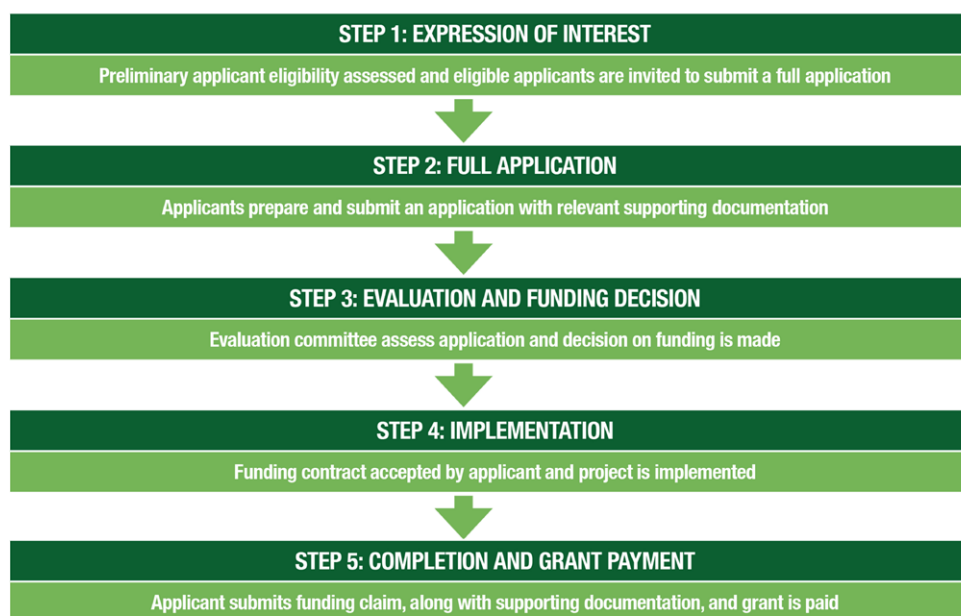
Themes, funding calls and rates

The LEADER Programme 2014-2020 targets funding towards key areas in need of support. Projects are supported in three thematic areas (1. Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation, 2. Social Inclusion & 3. Rural Environment). These three themes are broad enough to enable funding of a diversity of community-led projects both from private enterprise and community groups. Some types of activity cannot be funded such as insurance, legal expenses, planning application fees and working capital.

LAGs may operate a 'rolling call' for LEADER funding applications and accept applications on an ongoing basis. Targeted calls allow LAGs to concentrate funding in specific strategic areas of need or opportunity.

Depending on the nature of the project and the applicant type, different rates of funding aid apply. For example, analysis and development projects from a private business can be funded up to 75% of the total project costs while for community applicants it is up to 90%.
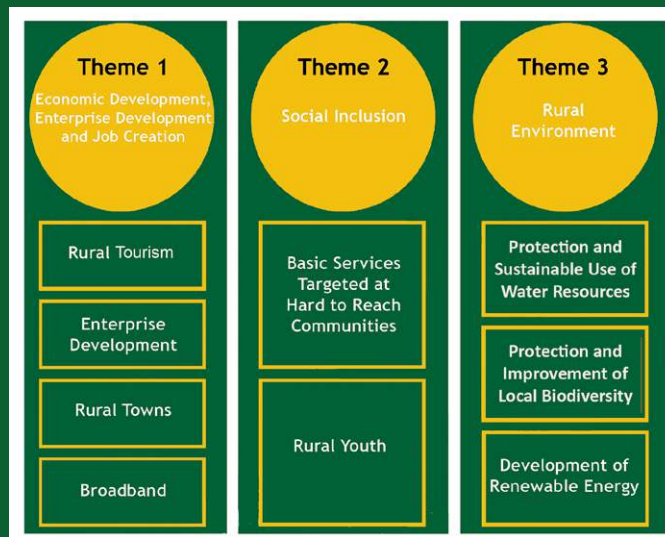
Applying for LEADER funding

STEP 1: EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
Preliminary applicant eligibility assessed and eligible applicants are invited to submit a full application

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STEP 2: FULL APPLICATION
Applicants prepare and submit an application with relevant supporting documentation

↓

STEP 3: EVALUATION AND FUNDING DECISION
Evaluation committee assess application and decision on funding is made

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STEP 4: IMPLEMENTATION
Funding contract accepted by applicant and project is implemented

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STEP 5: COMPLETION AND GRANT PAYMENT
Applicant submits funding claim, along with supporting documentation, and grant is paid

Step 1: Expression of interest

Before formally applying for LEADER funding applicants must submit an 'Expression of Interest (EOI)'. This helps to establish a project's eligibility, such as its fit with Local Development Strategy objectives. It also facilitates applicants to become familiar with the application process and requirements.

EOIs are then assessed by the Project Officers. Eligible applicants are invited to submit a full application.

Step 2: Making a full application

When submitting an application for LEADER funding details required depend on the type of applicant and project. For example, farmers need to provide their herd number and businesses their company registration number. Applicants must also include details of the proposed project such as a timeline, its main activities and anticipated local impacts. Each LAG uses the same standardised application form.

Budget and procurement

A budget must also be provided. If the project is also supported through other funding sources, these must be outlined and evidence documented. Previous public funding support must also be disclosed. Carrying out a procurement process is also required.

Supporting documentation

A range of supporting documentation must also be included with an application. Procurement evidence must be supplied. Accounts for three years and bank statements (three months minimum) for all accounts held are required. Depending on the applicant, different types of accounts are acceptable. Other requirements can also be needed as relevant. Specific requirements for individual projects can be discussed and determined with the Project Officers.

Match Funding

Projects generally require match funding. This can come from private funds or for community applicants also other public funds. Public funding from other EU sources is not permitted as match funding.

Step 3: Application Evaluation and Funding Decision

An evaluation committee from the LAG evaluates applications using set criteria and makes a recommendation to the LAG decision making members as to the suitability of the project for funding. If a project is not approved for funding applicants are informed of the reasons for this.

Step 4: Implementation

Once the applicant accepts the contract they can implement their project in line with its terms and conditions. The LAG must also check that the applicant has adequate resources (or bridging finance) to deliver the project. Bridging finance can be sourced for example through lending organisations such as Clann Credo, Community Finance Ireland, Micro Finance Ireland or Credit Unions.

Step 5: Completion and Grant payment

When the project is complete, the applicant submits a claim form to the LAG with the required supporting documentation such as invoices and the relevant bank statements. A Project Officer will carry out a site visit to verify the project is complete. A grant payment claim is then made by the LAG to the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). Once the funds are paid to the LAG the grant is paid by electronic fund transfer to the applicants designated account as soon as possible.

Irish Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners (IPs) Database

Interested in applying for LEADER funding, or learning more about accessing assistance under the LEADER Programme 2014-2020 from those responsible for selecting and approving community-led local development projects in your county? An interactive map featuring the contact details for all Irish LAGs and IPs can be found in the LEADER section of the NRN website: https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/local-action-groups/

This helpful 'one-stop-shop' map outlines the geographical boundaries of each of the 29 LAGs located throughout Ireland as well as an updated list of the Implementing Partners (IPs) located in each LAG region. This freely available database provides those interested in accessing funding under the LEADER Programme 2014-2020, with easy and convenient access to information about the Local Development Strategy and geographical coverage of their LAGs. It also contains relevant contact details, as well as links to each of the LAGs and IPs websites and social media pages.

Interactive Project Database Illustrates the Diverse Value of LEADER

Since its inception in 1991, LEADER has provided both private enterprise and community groups with the resources necessary to actively engage and direct the economic, social development and environmental protection of their local area, through community-led local development. The NRN have developed three interactive Storyboard database featuring 68 project examples funded under the each of the LEADER Programme 2014-2020 themes.

As well as indicating the geographical location of each project, these storyboards provide a summary of each, as well as links to further information. This innovative dessemination platform provides access to information on inspirational LEADER project examples and ideas to help potential applicants conceptualise projects and see what is possible for people living in rural communities throughout Ireland.

You can find these Storyboards in the LEADER section of the NRN website: https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/storyboards/

LEADER's Role in Climate Change Mitigation

The European AELCLIC-Pathfinder (Adaptation of European Landscapes to Climate Change) project held a climate action community group meeting entitled 'Brainstorming Betra' in the Tavern, Murrisk, Co. Mayo on the 1st of October 2019. Dr Maura Farrell, Lecturer in the Discipline of Geography at NUI Galway and Lead Researcher with the NRN spoke about this event about what the Rural Development Programme and in particular the LEADER Programme can offer local communities considering climate action. This event also included presentations from other international experts who shared their ideas on tackling local climate change issues.

The Rural Environment theme of the current LEADER Programme seeks to maximise the potential of environmental actions to contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities. It focuses on utilising the landscape within a local area, its features and natural resources, while simultaneously creating a greater environmental awareness and improving environmental protection. It is broken into three sub-themes: (i) Protection and Sustainable use of Water Resources, (ii) Protection and Improvement of Local Biodiversity & (iii) Development of Renewable Energy. You can explore project examples funded under these theme on the LEADER & the Rural Environment Interactive Storyboard database featured in the NRN website: https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/storyboards/

An article about the impact and success of the Irish NRN' interactive LEADER and EIP-AGRI Project Storyboard databases has been featured in the Spring/Summer 2019 edition of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Rural Connections magazine (p.36-37). The ENRD serves as a hub for exchange of information on how Rural Development policy, programmes, projects and other initiatives throught the EU are working in practice and how they can be improved to achieve more.

The ENRD recognise these Storyboards as a good practice dissemination model to communicate the success of the objectives set out in Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). Please see: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd_publications/publi-enrd-magazine08-2018-en.pdf

NRN Storyboards featured in ENRD Publication

Smart Villages and Rural Towns in Ireland National Seminar

A national seminar on the EU Action for Smart Villages Initiative, entitled 'Smart Villages and Rural Towns in Ireland: Revitalising Rural Areas through Community-Led Innovation' took place on 4th July 2019 in Athlone. The event, attended by over ninety delegates, was organised and run by the National Rural Network (NRN) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) to explore the potential of the EU Action for Smart Villages Initiative here in Ireland, with a particular focus on the key role of the LEADER Programme.

The Smart Villages initiative was launched by the European Commission in 2017. Smart Villages and Rural Towns, in an Irish context, are rural communities that build on, and enhance, their existing strengths and assets through creative thinking, and by embracing innovation, to create desirable places for rural people to live and work. In creating a Smart Village and Rural Town, community groups and individuals often overcome local challenges by exploring and implementing practical and tangible solutions. In particular, rural communities explore how local services, such as health, social services, education, energy, transport and retail, can be enhanced and sustained through the deployment of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools and community-led actions and projects. As such, digitisation is key to the creation of a Smart Villages and Rural Towns; however, social innovation is also paramount

The seminar was structured to build a greater knowledge base around the Smart Villages initiative and to demonstrate how it can be planned, implemented and realized in an Irish context, particularly in the context of the LEADER Programme post-2020. Speakers included Paul Soto, Policy Expert with the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), Dr Maura Farrell, Lecturer at NUI Galway and Lead Researcher with the NRN, Dr Stephen Brennan, Chief Digital Advisor to the Irish Government, Davie Philip, Co-President of the European Network for Community-Led initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability (ECOLISE), and Eoin Kinsella from the Duncannon Blue Flag Farming and Communities Scheme EIP-AGRI Operational Group. They demonstrated how rural communities can help retain and attract people to live and work in their locality by implementing practical solutions to the various local challenges they face in the form of digital, social and environmental innovation.

Attendees discovered how the realisation of such 'smart' rural areas and communities could play a key role in the development and sustainability of rural Ireland by tackling issues such as depopulation, the digital divide, limited employment opportunities and outward-migration, as well as climate change.

All guest speaker presentations and a full report on the 'Smart Villages and Rural Towns' national seminar held in the Sheraton Hotel, Athlone on the 4th of July 2019 have been added to the NRN website. Please see: https://bit.ly/2xlrPEl

A series of informative videos filmed by the NRN during this event with experts in this area can be found on the NRN's YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGo PgiMPMZoRGSHgREzYWyw/videos

A full report from this seminar can be found on the NRN website: https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Smart-Villages-and-Rural-Towns-in-Ireland-Seminar-NRN-Final-Report.pdf

Smart Villages and Rural Towns Seminar Presentations

ENRD Smart Villages Publications

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) have published four briefings developed by the ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages. These briefings have orientations to support policy-makers and implementers in creating an enabling policy framework for Smart Villages. The first briefing clarifies the aims, scope and focus of Smart Villages Strategies as well as possible strategic frameworks for supporting them. The other briefings are related to specific policy instruments that could be used to support Smart Villages on the ground now and in the future, such as LEADER, Cooperation and CAP digital strategies. Please see below:

- How to support Smart Villages strategies which effectively empower rural communities?
- How can LEADER/CLLD support Smart Villages?
- Using non-LEADER/CLLD cooperation to support Smart Villages
- How to ensure that digital strategies benefit rural communities?

An informative case study on this concept's relationship with the LEADER Programme 2014-2020, as well as its close ties to Ireland's new 'Smart Community' initiative has also been produced by the NRN team at NUI Galway. You can find this case study on the NRN website: https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader-case-studies/smart-villages-and-rural-towns-in-ireland/

For more information on the 'Smart Villages' initiative, please visit the ENRD Smart Villages Portal to discover a plethora of inspiring networks and initiatives across the EU.
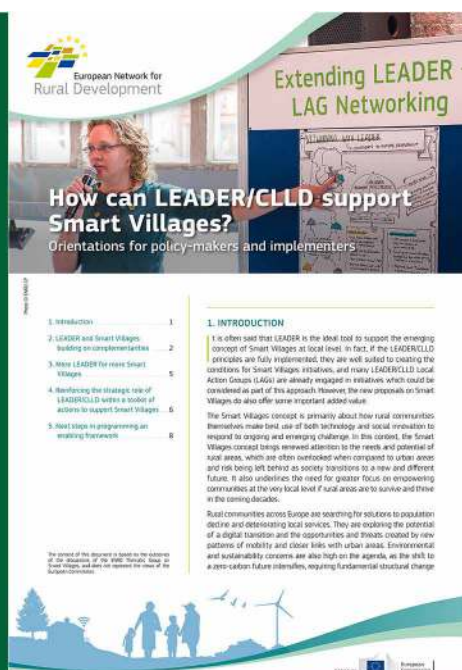
European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Smart Villages Publications

NRN Launch a New Series of LEADER Videos

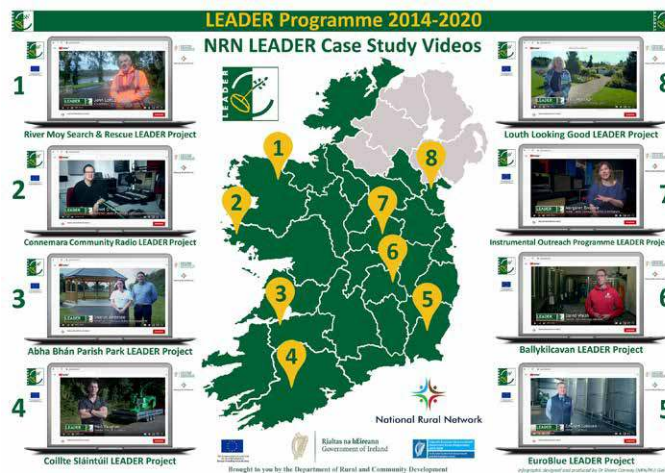The NRN developed a new LEADER video series this year. These videos were developed to show a range of LEADER projects happening across the country and put these projects and the people involved to the forefront to show how LEADER funding has helped their projects and how it has positively impacted their communities in different ways.

Videos were developed under each of the LEADER sub-themes and were spread right across the country. The projects captured included Coillte Sláintúil in Cork (Enterprise Development), Louth Looking Good (Rural Towns), Ballykilcavan Brewing Company in Laois (Rural Tourism), Connemara Community Radio in Galway (Basic Services Targeted at Hard to Reach Communities & Broadband), the Instrumen-

tal Outreach Programme in Westmeath (Rural Youth), the All Inclusive Parish Park (Protection and Improvement of Local Biodiversity) in Limerick, Euroblue Limited in Wexford (Development of Renewable Energy) and lastly the Marine Litter project with River Moy Search and Rescue in Mayo (Protection and Sustainable Use of Water Resources).

This new LEADER video series is now hosted and available to view on the NRN website under a newly developed LEADER Video Storyboard which can be found here: https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/cbaeda2af2bbfca269148e3cab1d01f3/leader-project-examples-nrn-videos/draft.html
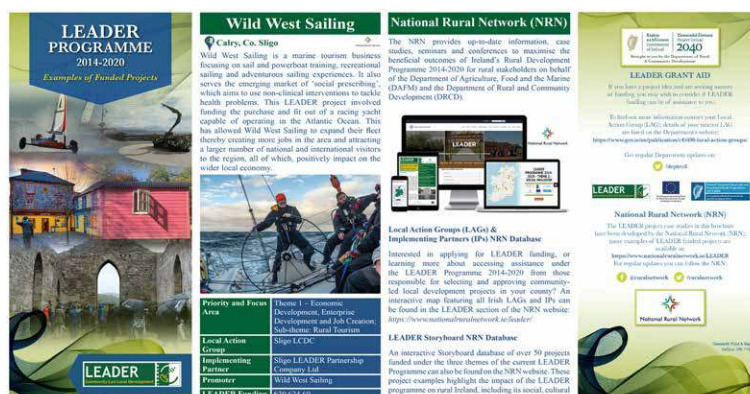

New LEADER Booklet Launched Online

The NRN and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) in conjunction with a number of Local Action Groups (LAGs), Implementing Partners (IPs) and Project Promoters have developed a new LEADER booklet.

This booklet aims to showcase a range of different LEADER supported projects from across the country, funded under the different themes and sub-themes. Projects included in this booklet included An Gairdín Beo - Carlow (Rural Towns); Blackwater Ecotours - Waterford (Rural Tourism); Wexford Home Preserves (Enterprise Development); Billys Tearooms and Shop – Kilkenny (Enterprise Development); Wild West Sailing - Sligo (Rural Tourism); Mobile Computer Training - Roscommon (Broadband); Purchase of an Exoskeleton Suit - Donegal (Basic Services for Hard to Reach Communities);

Age Friendly Roscrea- Tipperary (Basic Services targeted at Hard to Reach Communities); Butterfly Club Sensory Room - Limerick (Basic Services targeted at Hard to Reach Communities); Accora Orchestra - Cavan (Rural Youth); Meadow Maintenance Equipment - Laois (Improvement and Protection of Local Biodiversity); Protection of River Smearlagh Walk in Kerry (Protection and Sustainable Use of Water Resources); and lastly Sol Army A & D based in Co. Wexford (Development of Renewable Energy). This booklet was launched as a hardcopy at this year's Ploughing Championships in Carlow and has since been made available online on the NRN website and can be viewed here: https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader-case-studies/leader-2014-2020-examples-of-funded-projects-booklet/.

Irish LEADER Project Shortlisted for European Award

Mid Ireland Adventure, a LEADER funded start-up company addressing the growing demand for adventure sport activities in rural locations based in Banagher on the Shannon and Kinnitty Castle, Co. Offaly, was shortlisted in the 'Improving the Competitiveness of Rural Areas' category of the inaugural European Network for Rural Developmnet (ENRD) Rural Inspiration Awards 2019. This inititiave celebrates how rural development projects and policy contribute to a more competitive, sustainable and inclusive rural Europe. The awards ceremony for this initiative was hosted by Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture & Rural Development as part of the 'networX – Inspiring Rural Europe' event held in Brussels, Belgium on the 11th of April 2019.

James Claffey, NRN Manager and Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway and the NRN, are pictured here with Commissioner Hogan at these awards.

Mid Ireland Adventure LEADER Project Summary

Tourism is a sector of major importance to the rural economy, especially given the modern trend for active lifestyles. Some rural areas have not yet harnessed its full potential however. Mid Ireland Aventure founder Jonathan O'Meara was shortlisted for this prestigious European award as his company has identified a gap in the market for adventure sport in the rual midland region of Ireland by utilizing its natural amenities in order to help improve the viability competitiveness of his local area. LEADER funding supported the development of Mid Ireland Adventure facilitating the purchase of essential equipment such as mountain bikes and paddle boards. This growing business now provides a range of adventure sports activities to a diverse local and international client base. This includes mountain bike tours in the Slieve Bloom Mountains and stand up paddle board safaris on the River Shannon.

Mid Ireland Adventure LEADER Project Results

Harnessing Untapped Value within Natural Assets

Mid Ireland Adventure serves a gap in the local market for a tourism product based around adventure sports. The business also taps into wider trends of active lifestyle and demand for rurally based weekend adventure sports activities. The business capitalises on and harnesses the untapped value held within the under-celebrated midlands environment to develop an adventure sports business.

Expected Future Job Creation

Economic impacts include the new rural employment created. Jonathan is the main employee of the company and one seasonal position was created in 2018. As the company grows future job creation is expected. The mountain bike trails under construction in the Slieve Bloom mountains will also facilitate this, improving the local outdoors sports infrastructure.

Attracting New Visitors to the Midlands

Mid Ireland Adventure attracts greater visitor numbers to the midland's area, which does not have the visitor volumes of busier tourist regions. The company's adventure sport activities have attracted a local, national and international client base to the region. International clients have come from a diverse geography, such as Europe, the US and South America. Activities are also tailored to the needs of specific client groups and occasions, such as birthday celebrations, stag and hen parties.

Spin-off Benefits to the Local Economy

Increased visitor numbers also have additional spin-off benefits to the local economy. For example, Mid Ireland Adventure's mountain bike tour finishes in Kinnitty village with coffee and scones at a local café. Visitors also use local retail, hospitality and accommodation services. A strong, supportive local business network also exists in the area. For example, tourist service providers help promote each-others services helping build the local tourist economy.

Wider Spill-over Impacts

The positive spill-over impacts of Mid Ireland Adventure's presence in the Offaly region go beyond economic benefits. Mid Ireland Adventure supports increased local environmental, cultural and historical awareness as part of its activities by also building an educational element into tours. It has also added new life to Banagher town.

For more information read the full NRN case study on Mid Ireland Adventure:

https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/T1-Offaly-Mid-Ireland-Adventure.pdf

Mid Ireland Adventure Website: www.midirelandadventure.ie

# Partners Sought for LEADER Cooperation Projects

Approximately 30 LEADER cooperation projects are currently featured on the ENRD database and seek partners to coop-erate with. The LEADER Cooperation Scheme is designed to encourage rural areas to work together on joint projects with mutual benefits for each participating area. Cooperation is a partnership between LAGs but the partnership can also involve non LEADER groups.

Cooperation offers recently added to the ENRD database in-clude projects based in France, Lithuania, Romania and Fin-land. Details of projects and offering LAGs are available on the ENRD database.

Check out the ENRD database here: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/clld-partner-search_en

LEADER 2014-2020 Project Case Study Booklet Underway
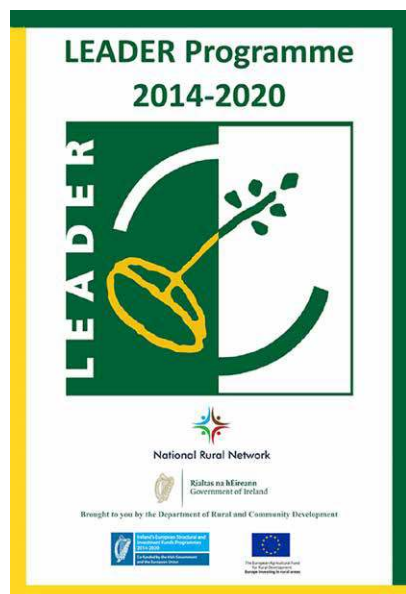
The National Rural Network are stepping up our efforts to highlight and promote the beneficial outcomes of Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 by designing and producing a LEADER Project Case Study booklet on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). This publication, which will be launched early next year, will highlight 72 inspirational LEADER project examples located throughout Ireland. The booklet will detail the main aims, objectives and background of the selected LEADER case study examples in order to help future applicants conceptualise their ideas and see what is possible through LEADER's community-led approach to rural development. Rural development strategies and projects are considered to be more effective and efficient if they are designed and implemented at local level by local actors. Through its 'bottom up' framework, LEADER supports the delivery of local development actions which address the overarching needs of rural communities throughout Ireland in an innovative, integrated and inclusive manner. The new LEADER booklet will also feature three informative infographics illustrating the geographical location of selected case studies funded under each of the three LEADER themes, as well as a case study on the Smart Villages and Rural Towns initiative. All 29 LAGs and their respective IPs will be represented in this publication. This good practice dissemination platform is just one of a number of multi-method communication strategies being implemented by the Irish NRN to maximize the success of the objectives set out in the RDP 2014-2020.

National Rural Network Website

For ongoing updates and further content on the LEADER Programme 2014-2020 please check out the LEADER section of the National Rural Network website: https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/

LEADER
Community-Led Local Development

Join the NRN for Free

If you are Interested in issues related to the LEADER Programme, please sign up to the National Rural Network (NRN) on our website on **www.nationalruralnetwork.ie.** The NRN is part of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020.

Our ambition is to bring the RDP into the lives of as many people as possible by communicating its key opportunities and outputs to all relevant stakeholders.

For regular updates follow us on:

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An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
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Ireland's European Structural and
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The European Agricultural Fund
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