

LEADER

Local Development Strategy

2023-2027

Summary Document



LAOIS
PARTNERSHIP
COMPANY

LEADER

Development led by local communities

Introduction



Laois Community and Enterprise Development CLG (t/a Laois Partnership Company) was incorporated in 2008. It is the local development company for Co Laois, and as such receives state and EU funding, to run a number of programmes that aim to enhance the local community across the County. One of these programmes is the LEADER programme, and we are delighted to launch the 2023-2027 programme for Co Laois.

LEADER stands for “Liasion Entre Actions de Développement de “Économie Rurale”, which translates as “Links between the rural economy and development actions”.

We have a long history of implementing this programme and in supporting these links, and have assisted a range of rural communities and individuals to establish businesses; engage in further training; develop community structures/infrastructure/services and achieve a better quality of life as a result of this guidance and funding.

We effectively embrace the bottom-up approach of the LEADER programme and work to establish sustainable structures in the local community through facilitating co-operation and linkages among agencies and community groups. As part of our tender to deliver this new LEADER Programme we conducted several consultation workshops with communities across Laois, to form a picture of what areas needed to be developed. The findings from these consultations, surveys and submissions helped form the actions of our Local Development Strategy.

This document aims to provide an overview and summary of our plan of action for the lifetime of this programme. It also aims to provide practical guidance and information to any group or individual applying for LEADER funding and we look forward to continuing to work with communities across Laois to do so.



LEADER

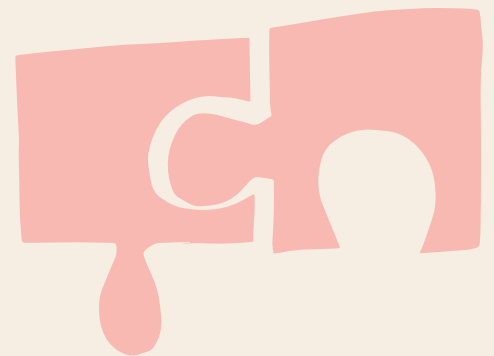
Programme

Introduction

The LEADER programme has been operating in Ireland and across EU Member States since its commencement in 1991 as a pilot rural development programme. LEADER has evolved through five successive programming periods to become a key intervention within EU rural development policy. It forms an integral part of the EU funding framework, delivered through national rural development programmes of each Member State. Over the three decades of its existence, the programme has supported the development of a wide range of innovative and sustainable projects that have brought increased jobs and vibrancy to rural communities across the EU.

LEADER is a community-led approach to local development funded through Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027. It is financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and connected to Specific Objective 8 of the CAP Strategic Plan. Funding is administered via the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).

It supports locally identified initiatives that seek to address locally identified needs and challenges. It is delivered by a network of Local Action Groups (LAGs), which have been selected to implement Local Development Strategies for their respective sub-regional areas.



The 7 Principles of LEADER

Places local communities at the centre of local development processes and is defined by consultation, participation and collective decision-making.

Bottom-Up Approach

The Local Action Group (LAG) is a central element of the CLLD approach and must comprise partners from public, private and civil society.

The Local Partnership

Networking is also a central element of the LEADER approach and seeks to support networking and exchange at local, national and European levels.

Networking

Fostering and supporting co-operation and collaboration between LAGS at national and European level.

Co-operation

Area-Based Approach

Focuses on coherent sub-regional areas and seeks to target the priorities and opportunities of the LDS area as a whole.

An integrated & multi-sectoral strategy

The LAG and their LDS should seek to capitalise on links and synergies between different sectors in their area.

Innovation

Supporting innovative solutions to local issues.

LEADER 2023-2027

Themes & Sub-Themes

Rural Infrastructure and Social Inclusion

- Rural Infrastructure
- Accessible Services
- Optimising Digital Connectivity
- Rural Youth

Economic Development and Job Creation

- The Green Economy
- Agricultural Diversification
- Rural Tourism and Recreation
- Enterprise Development
- Rural Food Production
- Social, Community and Co-operative Enterprises

Sustainable Development and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

- Sustainable Development of Rural Environment
- Climate Change Capacity Building
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Theme 1 Economic Development and Job Creation

1.1 Green Economy

Green and circular economy businesses will be established in the county and to address climate action challenges.

- 1.1.1 Provide training, capital and other supports for new and existing circular and green economy enterprises.
- 1.1.2 Support business planning and pre-development work for new and expanding businesses.
- 1.1.3 To support Ireland's objectives to have greater levels of material re-use rates in line with the EU average.

1.2 Agricultural Diversification

That the number of farm families who change their business model to one which does not rely solely on income from conventional farming activities, increases through the provision of targeted supports.

- 1.2.1 Encourage women in farming to start their own business through the provision of training, mentoring and financial supports.
- 1.2.2 Encourage farmers to investigate opportunities for social farming through awareness raising, capacity building and training supports.
- 1.2.3 Provide a range of awareness, training mentoring and capacity building activities to increase the number of farm families providing on-farm tourism activities in Laois.

1.3 Rural Tourism and Recreation

That the existing tourism offering in County Laois will be expanded upon, and investments made in raising the profile of the tourism landscape with key stakeholders, the tourism market and tourism service providers.

- 1.3.1 Increase and improve the stock of innovative tourism accommodation throughout Laois, through the provision of financial supports, which will in turn help to generate rural employment opportunities.
- 1.3.2 Provide stimulation training, mentoring capacity building and financial supports to encourage investment in new or existing tourism products and services in Laois.
- 1.3.3 Improve the utilisation of Laois's natural and heritage assets for the benefit of the local economy through raising awareness of the economic potential of cultural tourism opportunities, and provision of financial and other supports to sustainable festivals events.
- 1.3.4 Raise awareness of how to market Laois effectively to national and international visitors using 'You're Welcome to Explore' through engagement with tourism providers.



1.4 Rural Economic Development, Enterprise Development & Job Creation

That a culture of entrepreneurship is promoted in County Laois, supporting SME's that accelerate innovation and the transition to low carbon economy.

- 1.4.1 Provide financial support towards the establishment and expansion of SME's and micro-enterprises in Laois.
- 1.4.2 Provide training, mentoring and financial supports which can empower women and members of marginalised communities to pursue self-employment.
- 1.4.3 Following the development of a Craft Industry Strategy, support the development and delivery of training to nascent entrepreneurs who wish to explore business opportunities in the Creative Industries. Including those which bridge with the Circular Economy.
- 1.4.4 Support town centres to remain attractive places for doing business through the rollout of a capacity building and training programme and through co-operating with Town Teams.

1.5 Rural Food Production

That food and drinks producers in County Laois will continue to be supported, so that the number of companies located in the county continues to grow.

- 1.5.1 Provide financial supports, including towards pre-development work such as Feasibility Studies, to help attract and retain food and drinks businesses in Laois.
- 1.5.2 Promote the use of the co-brand, 'You're Welcome to Taste' to enhance the profile of new and existing food and drinks producers in County Laois.
- 1.5.3 Through the provision of capital investment, assist food and drinks businesses in Laois to take steps towards decarbonisation.
- 1.5.4 Through targeted training courses and events, promote the benefits and potential economic impact of the farm-to-fork initiative to rural entrepreneurs.

1.6 Social, Community & Co-operative Enterprises

That there will be an increase in the adoption of Social, Community and Co-operative Enterprise business models in Laois.

- 1.6.1 Provide awareness raising, and upskilling programmes to existing, nascent and potential social entrepreneurs on the potential of Social, Community and Co-operative Enterprise business models.
- 1.6.2 Provide financial support towards the establishment or expansion of social, community or co-operative businesses in Laois.
- 1.6.3 Building on the existing local assets that are available, provide support to improve the accessibility of community facilities, and to enhance the multi-use functionality of identified community assets.

Theme 2 Rural Infrastructure and Social Inclusion

2.1 Rural Infrastructure

That towns, villages and rural areas will be enhanced, helping to ensure vibrant rural areas for those who live, work, invest in and visit Laois.

- 2.1.1** Through community engagement animation supports and the provision of feasibility planning supports, empower community groups to address dereliction by reimagining the use and function of existing buildings.
- 2.1.2** Provide capital supports, which will aid private promoters and community groups to deliver on creating healthy town and village centres that support the well-being of inhabitants and the local environment.
- 2.1.3** Using a SMART Villages approach, support animation activities and pilot projects which will evaluate approaches to reducing car dependency and increasing other forms of sustainable travel and publish the evaluation of the pilot projects.

2.2 Accessible Services

That all communities have the opportunity to become involved in local decision making and local investment, in particular the areas least supported by LEADER to date.

- 2.2.1** Provide intensive animation supports to identified target communities which have previously received low levels of public investment and have been least supported by LEADER. These areas have been identified via our public consultation and previous records and include Graiguecullen, Ballylinan, Errill, Mountrath, Doonane and to a lesser extent Borris-in-Ossory.
- 2.2.2** Provide animation and financial support for the development of sustainable festivals and events that promote the integration of new communities living in County Laois.
- 2.2.3** Support and rollout of the Smart Village Co-operation Project; Next Stage: 'Smarter and Stronger Together'.





2.3 Optimising Digital Connectivity

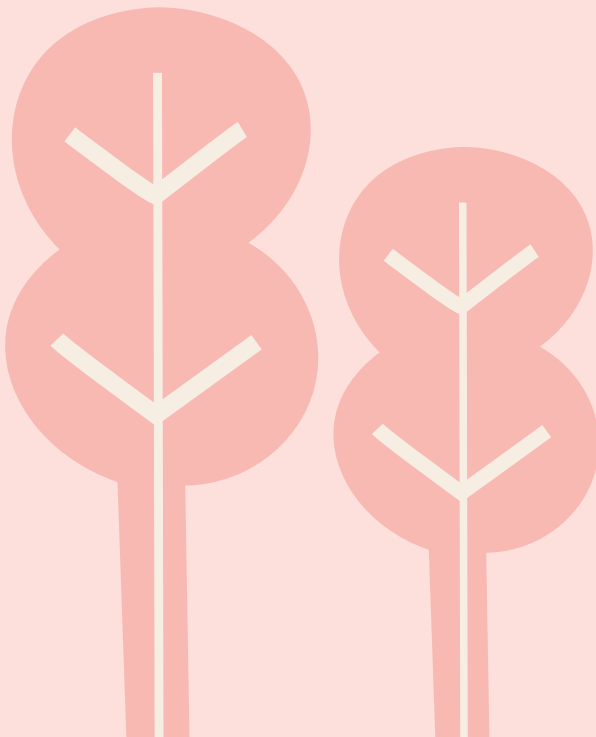
Building on existing broadband infrastructure and facilities, support the creation of new opportunities for people living and working in Laois.

- 2.3.1 Support retention of existing Hub Network.
- 2.3.2 Development and rollout of a digital literacy programme and investment in applications technology (apps), which will provide new and alternative ways of connecting people to services, which they are otherwise at risk of losing.

2.4 Youth

That rural youth in County Laois will be supported to thrive and to engage in civil society through the provision of appropriate amenities and spaces.

- 2.4.1 Provide financial and other supports for the repurposing and refurbishment of existing community facilities that ensures they are adaptable spaces, which will serve the needs of young people.
- 2.4.2 Provide a range of innovative and engaging training programmes and initiatives which will support young people to improve their resilience and increase their interest and engagement in volunteering
- 2.4.3 Through the development and implementation of a training programme build the capacity of youth group volunteers to undertake more activities outside with young people, using local areas such as the Slieve Blooms, or community bogs.



Theme 3 Sustainable Development and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

3.1 Sustainable Development of Rural Environment

That communities and enterprises will take positive actions to reduce the impact of climate change in Laois.

- 3.1.1 Support the development of biodiversity plans by Tidy Towns groups, sports clubs and Town Teams.
- 3.1.2 Provide financial and other supports for community and voluntary organisations to increase the biodiversity of their green spaces.
- 3.1.3 Provide capital support for enterprise and communities to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels.

3.2 Climate Change Capacity Building

Enhance and empower the social capital in creating behavioural change and actions that will combat climate change throughout Laois.

- 3.2.1 Provide training and mentoring to communities to enable action to reduce fossil fuel reliance in targeted areas in particular.
- 3.2.2 Continuation and expansion of training and mentoring to community organisations to enable action to protect and interaction with water bodies.

3.3 Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

That communities and individuals will know how to take practical action to enhance and protect biodiversity throughout Laois.

- 3.3.1 Undertake investigations that will inform the strategic direction of community owned bogs, and which will promote the protection and enhancement of bogs throughout Laois as habitats and carbon sinks.
- 3.3.2 Provide training, capacity building and finance to community groups wishing to undertake rehabilitation activities on bogs.
- 3.3.3 'A Bigger Splash': maximising socio-economic spill-over in North-West Kilkenny from the 'Just Transition' in the Midlands.

Application Process

EOI Stage (Expression of Interest)

1

- Animation by Project Officers.
- Promoter meets with Project Officer to discuss Project idea.
- Promoter will be invited to complete and submit an EOI form.



Application Stage

2

- If the Project idea is eligible – you will then be invited to complete and submit a detailed application form.
- The Promoter must submit all supporting documentation with the application – business plan, proposal, etc.



Evaluation Stage

3

- The Project is evaluated, reviewed by an Independent Evaluation Committee.
- Project recommended by Evaluation Committee and presented to LAG.



Approval Stage

4

- On approval by the LAG Letter of Offer/Contract issued to Promoter.
- The Letter of Offer/Contract must be completed and returned to LPC within 15 days of the date of the offer.
- The Promoter can then commence the Project (any commencement prior to receipt of the signed Letter of Offer/Contract is ineligible for funding, this will be verified by the Project Officer).



Grant Stage

5

- Grant payment is on completion of the project/or based on completion in phases.
- All paid invoices, receipts, bank statements and other supporting documents must be submitted to the Project Officer to start the drawdown process/before grant aid payment is received.

Summary of Current Funding Ceilings and Support Rates

Summary of Current Funding Ceilings and Support Rates:

C Community

P Private

Project Type	Applicant	Up to a max of	Max Funding
Community projects not involving economic activity	C	75%	€500,000
Community projects involving economic activity	C	75%	€200,000
Investment and other supports (including promotion undertaken as part of the implementation of a project)	P	75%	€200,000
	C	75%	
	C <i>under accessible services sub-theme targeted at hard to reach communities</i>	90%	
Analysis and development	P	90%	€30,000
	C	90%	
Training	P or C	100%	€200,000

The above ceilings must be adhered to in all instances unless expressly provided otherwise by the Department.



LEADER Funding

What *is* eligible

- ✓ Capital projects involving construction works:
 - Retro fits;
 - Refurbs;
 - Purchase of equipment.
- ✓ Marketing materials.
- ✓ Training (non-mainstream).
- ✓ Analysis and development – feasibility studies, community plans etc.

What *is not* eligible

- ✗ Primary agriculture and horticulture production (including beekeeping).
- ✗ Purchase of animals or livestock.
- ✗ Conventional retail operations, excluding community-based shops and farm shops, outlets selling locally produced produce.
- ✗ Courses of instruction or training which form the part of normal education programmes or systems at pre-school, primary, secondary, or higher levels up to and including FETAC & QQI Level 1.
- ✗ Continuous professional development courses.
- ✗ Loans.
- ✗ Operational Costs of Project Promoters – salary/overheads etc.
- ✗ Insurance for project promoters.
- ✗ Costs associated with meeting a legislative or statutory requirement.
- ✗ Planning application fees and other measures required for compliance.
- ✗ Reclaimable VAT.

This is not an exhaustive list. Please contact us to discuss further and to clarify eligibility.



Case Study

LEADER Project 2014-2020

Project Beneficiary/Promoter:

Camross Parish Development Association

Project Title/Description:

Fit-out of community building in Camross as multi-purpose Village Hub - Phase 2

Website/Social Media Link:

www.facebook.com/camrosscommunity

Theme: Rural Youth

Sub Theme: Social Inclusion

Local Development Strategy:

Support the development of a wide range of skills among rural youth including entrepreneurship

Total Project Costs:

€94,254.90

LEADER Grant Amount:

€70,691.17



“The input from Laois Partnership Company was invaluable, not just in terms of finance, but also for their guidance and advice.”

In 2019 a community plan for the Village of Camross was funded via the LEADER programme, and a village hub was identified as a top priority. The vision was to develop a multi-purpose recreational area, and a courtyard that would adjoin the recently completed sports hall. Work had already commenced on the sports/recreation building in 2018, and following the launch of the community plan, Camross Parish Development Association, applied via LEADER for funding to complete the project. The funding was used towards the cost of setting up a community kitchen and gym and for the installation of an air to water heating system. Funds were also used towards the costs of flooring, painting, IT fixtures and furniture. The new community hub is a warm, eco-friendly building for the use of all groups and associations in the community.

It facilitates a range of training and classes for all ages and members of the community. The building includes a multi-purpose room, training room, gym, kitchen and wi-fi enabled office. The new kitchen offers potential to support a community café or similar project.

One of the committee members, Johanna, offers some advice from the experience of Camross. She states that it is helpful that you talk to other groups, who have undertaken similar projects and that you investigate all available funding. It is also important to have an adequate skill set, amongst your group including including computer skills to keep the project on track and to maintain efficient paper trails and administration.

“The fact that the site is shared with the primary school will ensure a lively, youthful throughput and older people will now have a warm, comfortable meeting place. The hub provides a social outlet for all members of the community. It is super insulated, warm and energy efficient.”



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