

LEADER

Transnational

Cooperation

Guidance

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About this Guidance

This LEADER Transnational Cooperation (TNC) Guidance aims to supplement the information provided in the DG AGRI Guidance for implementation of LEADER Cooperation activities in Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020. Other, supplementary information can be found in the [LEADER Cooperation page](#) of the website of the European Network for Rural Development.

The first chapter of this Guidance describes what constitutes a cooperation project, its key benefits, and the main characteristics that make a 'good' cooperation project. The second and main chapter of the Guidance provides an overview of cooperation projects step-by-step, starting from the very early stages of considering a cooperation project, through the implementation of preparatory actions to the realisation of the actual project. This chapter also describes the basics of project evaluation and communication.



A [glossary of relevant terms](#) and a short [summary of relevant EC regulations and guidance](#) are presented in the end of this Guidance.

The 'tools' in this Guidance

The 'tools' referred to in this Guidance provide further information and guidance. The use of these tools is optional and can be accessed by clicking on the names of the tools listed in [section 5](#).

Member State/region specific TNC rules

Each RDP has its own requirements regarding TNC project proposals and implementation. For rural stakeholders implementing TNC projects it is very important to be aware of the rules regarding their own RDP, as well as the rules affecting their partners' TNC actions. The ENRD provides continuously updated information on LEADER Cooperation rules at individual RDP level in the form of fact sheets¹. You can find all the National Rural Development Programmes of Member States and regions on a dedicated website of DG AGRI.

Disclaimer

The text of this publication – and its annexes (the “tools”) - is for information purposes only and is not legally binding. The publication has been prepared by the ENRD Contact Point and its content does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.

¹ Available in the 'LEADER Cooperation' page: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-cooperation_en

Preface



Cooperation between local areas in Europe offers a multitude of benefits to participating local communities, local action groups, or other local stakeholders. It can strengthen local and European identities by helping partners in discovering their own values from the perspective of others, and learning to appreciate differences and similarities as valuable resources through mutual cooperation. Cooperation can also improve the competitiveness of participating rural territories by enhancing links between businesses, achieving a 'critical mass' for the introduction of new methods and approaches, which strengthens the innovative character and effectiveness of local development. Many previous rural development and TNC guidance materials have been prepared by National Rural Networks and provide a mix of useful methodological or technical advice on TNC approaches. These materials have now been distilled and re-packaged in this '**LEADER Transnational Cooperation Guidance**', which was first developed for the programming period 2007-2013. This second edition of the Guidance takes into account the new legal framework of LEADER in 2014-2020. It is primarily a tool for those Local Action Groups (LAGs) intending to start transnational cooperation. It also contains useful information for Managing Authorities (MAs) and National Rural Networks (NRNs).

The purpose of this LEADER Cooperation Guidance is:

- to clarify what cooperation is and the benefits it can bring; and
- to present a comprehensive step by step guide explaining the key concepts linked to planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of cooperation projects.

In the 2014-2020 programming period, LEADER is a dedicated measure (Measure 19²) of the national and regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), which includes (as a sub-measure) support to cooperation actions of LAGs. Each Managing Authority has established its own rules regarding implementation of this sub-measure (19.3). Such national (or, in the case of regionalised RDPs, regional) rules should always be consulted first, before undertaking any detailed preparation work on cooperation projects. Understanding the RDP rules and procedures is one of the keys to successful project performance.



For the purposes of this Guidance, the text will concentrate on information relevant to trans-national cooperation supported by RDP (EAFRD) funding.

Future updates of the LEADER Cooperation Guidance will incorporate links to relevant ENRD analysis of the Member States' own administrative rules. Updates will also aim to reflect the information needs of and feedback received from readers. Please send any suggestions for new and useful material, or general feedback on the Guidance, to leader-clld@enrd.eu. Your comments are warmly welcome!

² See Regulation 1303/2013 (Common Provisions Regulation), especially Art. 35, and Regulation 1305/2013 (EAFRD Regulation) Art. 44

1 Introduction

Transnational and inter-territorial cooperation have become increasingly important for rural stakeholders as effective mechanisms for helping rural areas to jointly develop new solutions to common issues (The added value of cooperation).

In the context of LEADER, cooperation projects are similar to local projects in the sense that they contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the relevant local development strategy. However, due to the essential element of working together with a cooperation partner external to the LAG territory they also have additional benefits related to mutual learning and achieving critical mass in terms of relevant knowledge, experience, methods applied, and other resources.

Substantial experience has been gathered during LEADER II (1994-1999), LEADER+ (2000-2006) and the LEADER Axis of RDPs (2007-2013). In a nutshell, cooperation projects can help all parts of rural Europe to grow together.

Facts and Figures

- During the programming period 2007-2013, a total of 1512 cooperation projects were implemented (as compared to 383 projects in the period 2000-2006); the number of LAGs involved in these projects was 2075 (data from DG AGRI SFC Database).
- The average size of a TNC project (total public funding) in 2007-2013 was approximately €51.000. About 1.14% of the total LEADER budget was used to support TNC projects.
- In 2014-2020 the budget allocated to cooperation (inter-territorial as well as transnational) is around €388 million, which corresponds to approximately 4% of the total budget for the LEADER measure in the EU. The funding allocated to cooperation varies greatly between Member States and regions: in 6 RDPs it is less than €20.000 per LAG, and in 30 RDPs this amount is between €20.000 and €100.000 per LAG. However, in some RDPs LAGs will have access to a significant amount of funding for cooperation: in 11 regions LAGs will have more than €500.000 each for cooperation.

In the 2014-2020 period EU legislation has opened up further possibilities of LEADER cooperation: LAGs supported under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) can now cooperate with local groups using Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) from other EU Funds, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). They can also implement cooperation projects with local groups applying an approach similar to CLLD in rural areas from countries outside the EU. This offers LEADER LAGs a far greater potential for cooperation than ever before.

The importance of cooperation for LEADER and CLLD is demonstrated by the fact that in the period 2014-2020 it is mandatory at RDP level (which means that Managing Authorities must make it possible for LAGs to initiate cooperation projects).

1.1 What is Cooperation?

Support under the LEADER Cooperation sub-measure encourages and supports LAGs to undertake joint actions with other LAGs, or with a group taking a similar approach, in another region, Member State, or even a third country. Two main types of cooperation are noted by the European Commission in the “EC Guidance for implementation of LEADER Cooperation activities in Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020”³. These are:

- **Inter-territorial cooperation** - This refers to cooperation between different territories within a Member State. Cooperation within a Member State concerns at least one LAG selected under the LEADER measure and may be open to other groups of local public and private partners implementing a local development strategy (in a rural, urban or coastal area); and
- **Transnational cooperation** - which is defined as cooperation between different rural areas from at least two Member States or with territories in third countries. Transnational cooperation covers at least one LAG selected under the LEADER measure and additional partners could include other groups of local public and private partners implementing a local development strategy. In case of third countries, the cooperating group must be located in a rural area.

In addition to funding for cooperation projects, LAGs can also benefit from preparatory technical support for cooperation⁴, provided they can demonstrate they are envisaging the implementation of a concrete project.

Joint Action

Cooperation projects should correspond to concrete actions with clearly identified deliverables producing benefits for each of the territories involved. These actions must be



‘joint’ in the sense that they are being jointly implemented and they bring benefits to all the cooperating partners. The content of such joint actions may cover a range of different activities eligible under the rules of the relevant RDPs. Joint approaches allow LAGs from one area to contribute funding to a joint project with project activities happening in the territory of its own or of its cooperation partner(s). The location of the project is not in principle a limiting factor if the LAG area benefits from the joint

project actions. *(Be careful! Some national/regional eligibility rules may specify otherwise).*

Examples of eligible joint actions (subject to national rules for RDP implementation) may include capacity building or knowledge transfer via common publications, training seminars, the development of a joint website or other ‘products’, twinning arrangements (exchange of programme managers and staff) leading to the adoption of common methodological and working methods, the ‘piloting’ of new approaches (e.g. to rural tourism, branding, etc.) or investments, or to the elaboration of a joint or coordinated development work.

³ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/leader-cooperation_guide_en.pdf

⁴ It is obligatory for Managing Authorities to envisage such support in the RDP, but it is not mandatory for LAGs to use it.

The costs of joint actions are typically shared among the cooperation partners (common costs). However, joint actions have also been implemented without sharing their costs (common costs not specified). In such an arrangement, each cooperation partner may cover the costs of a certain, clearly defined element of the joint action(s).

Cooperation and networking

Cooperation concepts are often closely related to networking concepts, since networking may foster cooperation and cooperation may result in creating new thematic networks.



Networking: is an activity which brings people (and their organisations) together around a common interest to undertake activities which are mutually beneficial to them.

Active networking can create relations between people and organisations, and generates new knowledge and thus cooperation opportunities.



Cooperation is a dynamic process!

Projects that start out as networking initiatives often end up becoming fully-fledged cooperation projects with tangible benefits and added value.

Establishing a new network can also be seen as a joint action. Networking for the sake of networking is not generally considered to be as useful as networking with the purpose of implementing a specific rural development action. Cooperation projects should therefore:

- address issues and themes important for the participating rural areas;
- contribute to achieving the objectives of the participating LAGs local development strategies;
- bring some significant added-value to the participating LAG areas, the activities targeted, the actors involved or, more widely, the local population; and
- be implemented with well-defined and realistic objectives.

In order for tangible results to be achievable, the limits of the project need to be determined well in advance.

1.2 Why Cooperate?

1.2.1 The added value of cooperation

Cooperation can provide local projects with alternative and novel opportunities to look for solutions to the problems of their areas. Cooperation projects are capable of producing different types of added-value. The following examples illustrate some different forms of added value possible from cooperation actions:

Strengthening the territorial strategy and local partnerships

TNC projects should meet the needs and opportunities of CLLD areas and contribute to the objectives of the respective local development strategies of the cooperation partners. Getting to know other areas and other stakeholders, often facing similar types of issues, can strengthen the local partnership and encourage creative approaches to facing the local challenges.

Ex. **Example: Growing Gastronomists**, a cooperation project of LAGs from Estonia, France and UK. The project involved strengthening links between schools and local food producers, exploring different culinary traditions. The joint activities had an important impact on the strategic objectives of participating LAGs, all of which wanted to promote short supply chains and better connect farmers with local food consumers. The project also helped strengthen the partnerships through the involvement of schools, farmers and chefs and motivated them to work together⁵.

Making projects more ambitious by reaching critical mass

TNC can enable a project to achieve a greater critical mass, the total benefits can be much greater than the sum of individual achievements (1+1=11). Pooling resources and expertise can result in economies of scale and synergies, which are favourable to achieving project objectives (such as technical equipment/technologies, training, marketing, etc.).

Ex. **Example: Bees and Biodiversity**, a cooperation project between LAGs from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Slovakia and the UK. The project aimed to exchange and strengthen local bee conservation practices and to carry out awareness raising activities through targeted information campaigns. The outreach and overall impact of the project was much greater as a result of the involvement of a large number of actors from 7 EU Member States⁶.

Improving competitiveness: finding new business partners, positioning in new markets

Implementing a project with transnational partners can help the promotion of local products and the area of their origin. TNC may provide access to new business opportunities, hence generating a potential for: increased product sales; a complementary business partner to improve a product or process; and additional know-how. Rather than other areas representing potential competition, cooperation enables the partners to take advantage of complementarities, and to benefit from similarities.

Ex. **Example: Cross-border Entrepreneurs**, a cooperation project of LAGs from Poland and Sweden. The project aimed to develop new business opportunities for local producers through cross-border

⁵ See ENRD Brochure "[The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Project Examples 2007-2013](#)"

⁶ See ENRD Brochure "[The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Rural Development Priorities 2014-2020](#)"

cooperation. A new range of products linked to culinary heritage and eco-tourism were developed, including starting a production of smoked cheese in Sweden (based on the Polish experience) and finding new customers in Sweden for a Polish bakery⁷.

Supporting work and promoting innovation through new skills

New visions and new dimensions can support and promote new ways of working. Furthermore, exposure to transnational experiences can help broaden business horizons and encourage companies to adopt improved operational approaches. These in turn should generate knock-on socio-economic and/or environmental benefits for rural areas.

Ex. **Example: CULTrips:** a project involving LAGs from Luxembourg, Austria, Estonia, Finland and Italy. The project developed new rural tourism activities – a mixture of social and creative tourism, with the strong involvement of local people – in areas which had not previously offered tourism services. According to the partners, working together with people from different regions of Europe helped find “out-of-the-box” solutions and was a real “catalyst of innovation”⁸

Developing territorial identity and raising awareness

Transnational cooperation can help local people discover their own area and history. By improving the understanding of their own territory, transnational interactions can lead to local actors becoming more open to representing their territory, and thereby becoming true ‘ambassadors’ of their areas.

Ex. **Example: Loving local values,** a project involving LAGs from Estonia and Finland. The exchange led to an enhanced understanding by the LAGs and their local partners of the potential of the local food and heritage. Activities included the organisation of seminars for food producers and tourism farms, creation of a special website on local food and a cookery book (Estonia), thematic walks and video about village tourism products (Finland). New target groups were reached such as kindergarten and school cooks, who became very active in the field of culinary heritage⁹.

⁷ See ENRD Brochure [“The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Project Examples 2007-2013”](#)

⁸ See ENRD Brochure [“The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Rural Development Priorities 2014-2020”](#)

⁹ See [EAFRD Project Examples Brochure: Project Nominations by National Rural Networks](#)

Valorisation of a special topic (e.g. natural, historical or cultural heritage)

TNC projects can also contribute to the valorisation of natural, historical or cultural heritage in rural areas.

Ex. **Example: Ecomuseum – from memories to future:** a project involving LAGs from Finland and Italy. The project focused on communality and a future based on traditions by involving youngsters and elderly people in village development. Despite its name, this was neither an ecological museum, nor any ordinary museum. The term refers to objects that bring out history, traditions and everyday life of ordinary people. The communality has been implemented based on things (places, stories or objects) which are important in the life of people living in the villages. The “ecomuseum-thinking” will be utilised in product development in the field of tourism, in other businesses and in adult education. The project developed new rural tourism activities – a mixture of social and creative tourism, with the strong involvement of local people – in areas which had not previously offered tourism services. According to the partners, working together with people from different regions of Europe helped “find out-of-the-box” solutions and was a real “catalyst of innovation”¹⁰

1.2.2 The ‘soft benefits’ of cooperation

A number of ‘softer’, often intangible, benefits can also be gained from cooperation work, for instance:

Broadening one’s mind by considering differences as a source for enrichment

Working with a transnational partner offers the potential to discover new or alternative points of view and to become aware of different peoples’ visions. It can help the local stakeholders look at their area with “new eyes” and strengthens their capacity to innovate.

Developing European citizenship and sense of identity

A TNC project can provide an opportunity for raising awareness about the European Union’s actions and European citizenship among the local population. It is a way to identify and present the local area’s place within Europe.

Acquisition of new skills

Implementing a TNC project often involves gaining new know-how about specific development methodologies or techniques. They often involve learning new language skills. Cooperation actions can therefore represent effective capacity building approaches for rural stakeholders.

¹⁰ See the Nordic-Baltic Cooperation Awards projects (<http://www.maainfo.ee/index.php?id=17&rid=1513&page=3635&>)

1.3 What is a good cooperation project?

TNC projects are quite diverse in nature, but a number of common TNC success factors exist that can help ensure good cooperation projects. These include:



The tools which can help you:

- ✓ LEADER+ and LEADER 2007-2013 cooperation's good practices: examples of projects – see [project brochures](#) on the ENRD website;
- ✓ “Co-operation between rural areas: LEADER and extra-LEADER projects of Italian LAGs” (in English) – a report by the Italian NRN

- **Following a territorial approach.** LEADER is supporting "territorial cooperation" between LAGs; TNC projects should fit well with each LAG's local development strategy. Projects should address challenges in LAG areas in order to ensure their relevance and added value;
- **Having a strong and clear project idea** which contributes to the realisation of the objective(s) of the local development strategy. A general topic, even if adapted at a later stage with the partners, may fail to provide such a contribution;
- **Identifying the right cooperation partners.** Even if the cooperating LAGs come from very different regions of Europe, they must share common objectives and a common vision of the results they are trying to achieve. There should also be some degree of similarity between the local challenges they are facing and hoping to meet with the aid of a cooperation project.
- **Going beyond simple exchanges.** TNC projects ideally go beyond a simple exchange. They should include common actions which create tangible results. Concrete and common actions (like joint acquisition of technology, creation of common events or products, joint experimentation/piloting etc.) are effective ways to find answers to the challenges of rural areas;
- **Planning properly for human resources.** The development, coordination, implementation and management of a cooperation partnership and project can be demanding. Human resource requirements need to be carefully considered from the early stages of project development; and
- **Building a strong partnership.** Throughout the life-cycle of a TNC project it is beneficial to:
 - **Define the profile** of your desired partner(s) to make the partner search easier;
 - **Negotiate and distribute roles and responsibilities** between the partners while developing the project (and include these in the partnership agreement); and
 - **Maintain and manage the partnership** during the implementation of the TNC project.

2 Cooperation step by step

Due to some additional steps in their overall life cycle and differences in implementation frameworks between Member States, TNC projects tend to be more complex than other rural development projects.

This part of the guide takes readers through each of the main steps involved in transnational cooperation: getting ready to start cooperation, preparatory actions, implementing TNC projects, evaluating and communicating their results.



2.1 Getting ready to start

A LAG which is interested in starting a cooperation activity needs:

- to make sure that the cooperation activity addresses actual local needs as identified in its local development strategy;
- to identify people in the area who must be involved and speak languages which are needed;
- to ensure there is support for cooperation and involvement in the local community;
- to identify – at least tentatively – potential cooperation partners, with whom it could jointly explore the future cooperation through preparatory action.

2.1.1 Ensuring community support and involvement

Before taking the decision to cooperate, the LAG should always consider its strategy and see what local needs or opportunities can be addressed through trans-national cooperation (this can happen at the stage of strategy formulation). Once such needs are identified and before launching a cooperation project, a number of baseline actions are advised at the level of each partner LAG. These help ensure that the project starts on a sound foundation. While in some Member States only the LAG can formally be the beneficiary of a TNC project, a strong involvement of other local actors is essential for the success of cooperation.

This initial step should help:

- Make local stakeholders aware of what benefits cooperation can bring;
- Identify cooperation promoters and partners within the area; and
- Identify tangible cooperation ideas which respond to the identified needs and opportunities.

Expected results from this process should be an informed group of stakeholders possessing knowledge about cooperation and the opportunities that it offers, and willing to be involved in, or contribute to, a cooperation project. This group of supporting stakeholders should be as broad as possible and involve different types of actors.

Mobilising potential cooperation project partners at the LAG level for this first step can be helped by setting up an informal working group or ‘cooperation think tank’ of local people. The ‘think tank’ would be a discussion forum to identify and prioritise potential themes that cooperation could focus on for the LAG area, and to start collecting initial ideas of activities that could be carried out jointly with a transnational partner or partners. In some LAGs this

process may have already been started at the strategy development stage.

Key points to getting started:

- Encourage local stakeholders to become interested in cooperation;
- Possibly create a local ‘cooperation think tank’, and
- Identify cooperation ideas.

2.1.2 Preliminary identification of partners

Finding the right partner is one of the key success factors of a TNC project. You may achieve this by:

- identifying the desired characteristics of your potential partner;
- preparing a “cooperation advertisement / offer”
- using partner search methods and tools
- responding to a cooperation offer from another LAG.

Identify the desired characteristics of a “good” partner

Searching for a partner is not a question of chance. You should define the desired profile of your cooperation partner and your expectations concerning the type of expertise and knowledge that you are looking for. Such desired characteristics of a partner LAG might include:

- Similarities in terms of characteristics and challenges of the area – physical (coastal, mountains...), historical (built heritage, ...), socio-economic (predominance of small industries, ...), cultural (music, language, identity...) characteristics;
- Complementarity of know-how, experience;
- Geographical location: proximity of territories (cross-border, neighbouring LAG territories, etc.);
- Existence of an ongoing partnership set up by a local actor; and/or
- Language and other communications issues.



Example: building a cooperation project around similarities: Traditional sailing and maritime heritage. LAGs from Denmark, Finland and Estonia have a common tradition linked to sailing and traditional ships. LAGs from these countries implemented a joint project to promote their maritime heritage and involve children and youth in learning about sea going, ship building and the Baltic sea environment¹¹,

You should think about the size of partnership and consider how many partners you are looking for. The answer depends on the objectives of your cooperation project. Some projects may need a large partnership to be achievable. For others, a partnership between three or four areas may be ideal.

A balance needs to be found to ensure that project partnerships are sufficiently large to be dynamic and provide added value, but care needs to be taken to avoid unduly complex partnerships, where mutual understanding may be hard to achieve.



Example The project “Nature Tourism” involved seven LAGs from such vastly different countries as Finland, France, Hungary, Portugal, UK and Cape Verde, as well as many other partners such as tourism offices and tourism entrepreneurs. The objective was to exchange

¹¹ See [EAFRD Project Examples Brochure: Project Nominations by National Rural Networks](#)

different practices concerning nature and culture-based tourism products and develop new products and new business opportunities. The large scale of the partnership helped generate new business contacts and increased the confidence of the tourism sector¹².

Prepare an advertisement to attract potential cooperation partners



The drafting of a ‘cooperation ad’ can be a good way of finding the right partner.

The ad needs to include enough details to help readers understand your main cooperation interests.

It should also indicate your willingness to discuss ideas from partners that might help add value to the TNC proposal.

Ideally, the ad should be able to sum up in few short sentences:

- What it is you want to gain from the cooperation project; and
- How will this benefit the rural communities, businesses and/or environment in your



Be aware!

Cooperation involves combining different ideas and points of view, and mutual respect is an important TNC principle.

Be careful not to develop your initial project idea with too much detail and be ready to change it later! Partners may have useful and interesting new ideas that help improve your original project proposal so you should be flexible and open minded to accommodate their contributions.

area?

Use different methods to search for a partner

You should use a range of tools in order to increase your chances of success in your search for potential partners.

Before starting the search, remember...

- Your cooperation idea should be sufficiently specific to let others understand what you are looking for;
- You should take time to think about the profile of your ‘ideal’ partner;
- A partnership of only two partners is risky, because if one partner decides to quit the project will end. Do not hesitate to make contacts with more than one potential partner in order to increase your chances for success.

Partner search methods:

First of all, you should find out if there are already connections with other European areas in your LAG e.g. through town twinning. These contacts are a good basis for a cooperation project and you need less time to get to know the partner area.

Events - participating in events is a good way to meet potential partners. Many events at European or national level support cooperation through special sessions or “cooperation

¹² See [EAFRD Project Examples Brochure: Project Nominations by National Rural Networks](#)

corners” (see ENRD [events page](#)); there can also be special events dedicated to stimulating cooperation (cooperation fairs). A few preparations before the event or fair will help improve your chances of meeting the right partners. These include:

- **Before the meeting** - write down your cooperation idea (or a cooperation ad, if relevant), have a look at the other cooperation ads, identify potentially interesting cooperation offers, organise a first contact with identified potential partners to plan a cooperation ‘rendezvous’ during the meeting, prepare a presentation of your territory, (using photos, maps, charts etc.);
- **During the meeting** - aim to combine meetings with all your potential partners in one ‘cooperation rendezvous’; and
- **After the meeting** - stay in contact with potential partners regularly during the project development phase. Do not lose contact with groups that do not immediately join the partnership, since they may be useful for future cooperation work.

Participation in **thematic conferences** is another useful way to meet potential cooperation partners. You will meet rural actors who work on the same topics as you and this can lead to cooperation proposals.

ENRD partner search tools - your cooperation ad should be advertised in at least one TNC partner-search database. You could start with posting a cooperation offer on the ENRD website¹³, where a fully-fledged interactive partner search tool will be available shortly. It will provide a large number of search options using specific rural development categories, in addition to country and regional search opportunities.

Further search tools and support for TNC is available at both European and national levels; your national or regional Network Support Unit (NSU) will also be able to help you find a TNC partner.

If you are interested in cooperation with a fisheries LAG, you can place your offer at the [FARNET cooperation page](#).

¹³ The cooperation offers and a template are available at: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/cooperation_en

Responding to a cooperation offer

If you are approached by a rural area for the purpose of becoming a project partner, you need to think about several elements before reaching a decision:

- Is the cooperation idea relevant to your cooperation strategy?
- Does the potential partner correspond to your partner profile, what are the similarities and complementarities?



Be aware!

Eligibility criteria and funding requirements for cooperation actions can differ between RDPs. Always check what kinds of activities are eligible for TNC projects as early as possible in the project development process.

2.2 Preparatory actions

What you have already done at this stage:

- ✓ Your local stakeholders are aware and mobilised;
- ✓ You have defined your cooperation strategy;
- ✓ You have identified your cooperation ideas and partners;
- ✓ You have your cooperation idea(s); and
- ✓ You have identified your potential partner(s).



Preparing a cooperation project represents a transitional step between the cooperation idea and the implementation of the project. In the 2014-2020 funding period, the EU legislation requires Managing Authorities to make “preparatory technical support” available to finance activities that can help LAGs develop a cooperation project. Such support may cover activities

such as meetings, study visits, studies, expert support etc., and can be eligible even should the partners finally decide not to launch a joint action (however, they must demonstrate that they **envisaged** the implementation of a concrete cooperation project)¹⁴. Rules and criteria related to the eligibility of preparatory actions may vary among EU MSs/regions.

This step should aim to:

- Get to know partner(s) with whom you are going to implement your project, and their areas;
- Meet and/or discuss with your potential partner(s) to agree on the project aims, actions and work programme;
- Prepare a detailed description of the TNC project through a strong dialogue with partners; and

¹⁴ See Art. 44 of Regulation 1303/2013. In some RDPs, this requirement of demonstrating that they envisage the implementation of a concrete project is fulfilled by providing a statement of intent signed by all potential cooperation partners.

- Clarify the eligibility criteria / funding rules for both your own and your partners' territories concerning expenditure eligibility for different project actions, legal and other restrictions on types of applicant or partners, as well as the application process requirements, deadlines and paperwork.

Expected results from this process should be:

- Partner(s) for the TNC project have been identified;
- A detailed description of the project has been prepared with all its components (aims, actions, work organisation, management modalities, budget, responsibilities, etc.); and
- Knowledge about different administrative rules and procedures.

The main phases involved in this step and advice about each phase are presented below.

Key points to preparing a cooperation project:

- Meeting your partner(s) and agreeing to cooperate;
- Preparing a transnational cooperation application for funding;
- Negotiating the financial aspects of a cooperation project;
- Bringing together the required resources (knowledge and technical); and
- Getting the financial, legal and administrative structures right.

2.2.1 Meeting your partner(s) and agreeing to cooperate

Although there are many ways of communicating with your partners, face-to-face meetings and visits are an essential component of good cooperation, as they build trust between partners and help avoid or clarify misunderstandings. Exchange visits between areas or actors with similar characteristics or resources are important to identify potential topics of mutual interest and joint learning opportunities.

Prepare and organise a meeting with your partner(s)

The first meeting with your partner or partners should be carefully prepared in order to improve the chances of good results. Of course, more meetings may be needed (and they may take place in a different area each time).

Before the meeting:

- Do some structured preliminary work with partner(s) - share information about the situation and the challenges of your areas, about the outline of your cooperation project (clarify what you imagine, confirm what your partners imagine and what you could do together). It can be useful to exchange documentation about the partners' areas and projects (sometimes, translation of such documents might be needed);
- Exchange views with the partner(s) about the programme of the meeting. Agree the working language. This first meeting is a crucial moment and ideally everybody should speak the same working language. If not, you should plan for interpretation. Dedicated interpreters are very useful and allow LAG staff to concentrate their minds on the project, rather than thinking about translations;
- Ensure that there is adequate time for informal exchange – make it fun to be involved - this can be an important part of creating trust in the initial phases between future cooperation partners;
- Mobilise local stakeholders to attend this meeting, where their presence is relevant and possible;
- Decide the composition of your delegation. The ideal 'team' should include the LAG

manager, representative of the LAG's technical team, project promoter(s), LAG members, and possible financial partners, as well as other 'counterparts' to the members of the other delegation (e.g. mayors or representatives of businesses, sectors relevant to the project from both/all partner territories);

- Identify a moderator for the meeting(s) and a person who will prepare the report of the meetings;
- Prepare a presentation of your territory's context, its challenges and the potential added value of the cooperation project for your territory. Videos can be more attractive than PowerPoint presentations; and
- Organise some small gifts, such as local products, to thank your partner(s).

During the meeting you should envisage at least the following points:

- All participants introduce themselves;
- Presentations of each partner - territory, structure, administrative organisation, etc.;
- Discussion about individual and common cooperation objectives by each partner - what each of them expects from the cooperation project; and
- Define different roles and agree responsibilities between partners (including the 'lead partner'), the budget for each partner and for the common costs (if relevant) and the next steps.

After the meeting:

- Promptly prepare a draft report of the meeting(s)/visit. Send this to partners for comments and validation; and
- Plan a report for the project's local stakeholders in your area, to inform them about their (potential) partners. Photos and videos are useful for raising awareness about the partner territories.



Be aware!

The costs of such preparatory meetings could normally be covered by preparatory technical support to cooperation projects. Whether you are using such support or other funding, be clear about who pays for what!

You should discuss and agree with your partner(s) about the sharing out of travel costs, accommodation, catering, interpretation, etc. prior to the meeting. This will avoid misunderstandings as to who will pay for what.

Prepare and organise a study visit to or from your partner(s)

A study visit is an important method to understand how potential partners solve a specific problem or address a specific issue in their local environment.

If you go to visit your partners, you will find useful much of the advice provided above regarding preparation for a partners' meeting. You should also remember to keep an open mind and try to understand the point of view of your partners.

If it is your turn to welcome your partner(s), you should plan specific actions:

- Propose a programme to be agreed by all partners before the meeting;
- Organise of a guided tour of the territory and study visits (including visits to relevant projects, if possible) to help your partner(s) understand the characteristics and the

- challenges of your territory; and
- Mobilise local stakeholders (including elected representatives) and involve them in the dynamics of cooperation.



Be aware!

Plan for informal visits and for time dedicated to each type of participant!

When you and your partner are thinking about the programme of the visit, you should plan:

- To combine workshops and informal activities for the partners - it is important for people to have time to meet and to get to know each other beyond the 'formal' meeting. They will be the ones working together!
- To have moments specially dedicated for elected people and others for LAG managers and/or the person responsible for cooperation.

Confirm the partnership

It is important to conclude this stage at the end of the initial meeting/visit. Preparing a written report document which indicates initial commitments of the partners provides a useful means to confirm whether or not the partnership can proceed with further work on the joint project. Such a document can also indicate who will be the lead partner, who will coordinate the proposal writing and/or the preparation of proposal writing etc.



Partnerships often produce a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to formalise and make explicit important agreements between partners. If required by the relevant national/regional rules, such an MoU, or a draft cooperation agreement (which will enter into force when the project is approved), can be an attachment to the application for funding.

See the '[Cross-Cultural Analysis for Learning Handbook](#)' developed by a multinational team of LEADER practitioners and published by the Swedish NRN, for useful advice about setting up TNC partnerships. The PMI (Plus/Minus/Interesting) methods provide particularly relevant reading regarding partnership work.



The tools which can help you:

- Check list 'What to think about the first meeting with your partners?' (Annex 4)
- How to present your territory to your partner? (Annex 5)

2.2.2 Preparing a transnational cooperation application for funding

Following confirmation of the partners' willingness to develop a joint project, the next step involves applying for project funding. LAGs will normally each apply for their own funding to the respective managing authority. Applications can be prepared by the project team or by experienced external consultants. Please be sure to check which types of costs are eligible to be covered by the preparatory technical support for cooperation projects under your RDP and those of your partners.

Before starting to prepare your application, it is extremely important to agree with your partners about **what your project is going to achieve and how you will measure it**. You must keep in mind the following:

- All applications require details about the intended outputs and results - most ask for these to be quantified in terms of **targets**;
- Targets should not be viewed as a bureaucratic burden and should be used as a key management tool by the partnership to help it track its own performance;
- Targets can also include qualitative goals. The important point to note is that you will be
- required to report on all your targets and so you will need to have monitoring systems in place to track progress against targets;
- It is essential that these must be agreed and established from the start of the project, in order to track the full impact of all project actions.

One of the main success factors involved in drafting TNC funding applications is your understanding of the RDP rules/procedures about cooperation. It is advisable to know about the rules in both your own and your partners' territories. Such information can be found in the ENRD summary fact sheets on MS / RDP rules and procedures for LAG cooperation¹⁵

Another success factor is being able to make a clear presentation of your project proposal. This should contain (at least) the following elements:

- Presentation of the structure and organisation of the partnership;
- Presentation of the lead partner's and other partners' territories;
- Common and individual objectives;
- Planned actions - transnational actions and, when relevant, local actions which will also be part of (and be financed by) the project;
- Expected results and added value offered;
- Monitoring and evaluation framework (including indicators);
- Calendar and time-table;
- Roles of the different partners;
- Project management structure (including reference to human resources and their experience);
- Financial aspects covering costs and resource requirements. Differentiate between costs borne individually by partners, and common costs which cannot be attributed to a single partner only (such as a joint event or website). Clarify different partners' budget allocations. Plan your LAG's project related expenditures to enable 'smooth' delivery of your project related tasks. Consider contingencies, e.g. if different/non-fixed currency exchange rates are involved; and
- The communication strategy (targeting internal and external groups).

The content of the application form(s) has to be developed jointly and agreed by all partners before submission. Such a procedure helps to ensure ownership of the project by all partners and encourages consistency across the partners' different funding applications. Endorsement of the lead application by all partners may require translations of the text, which should be

¹⁵ RDP fact sheets on LEADER cooperation are uploaded to the ENRD website (http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-cooperation_en) as relevant data is verified/validated by the respective MS/regional authorities.

budgeted for.

Complementary documents and adaptations might also be required (i.e. letters of intent and/or of commitment of the different partners, etc.), so make sure that you attach all the required elements when you send your application form. Some MAs may require a signed cooperation agreement at this stage, in such cases all the partners may need to prepare and sign such an agreement before submitting the application.

Be aware!



Ensure and allocate sufficient time to produce/complete your application form, do not wait until the last moment! TNC applications take time to complete since they need to be written and then approved by your partner(s) and sometimes by different authorities of respective RDPs.

2.2.3 Negotiating the financial aspects of a cooperation project

Financial aspects of TNC projects are quite unique since these projects combine:

- Different budgets from partners located in different areas / different Member States / different countries where legal requirements may not all be the same (or even the currency);
- Different levels of intervention, (local expenses incurred by each partner as well as shared expenditures related to the whole partnership); and
- Different financial sources which each have specific requirements.

Clarifying financial issues at the beginning of a project, and involving financial partners at an early stage, enables the partners to anticipate difficulties and find ways to overcome them in advance.



The first questions to be answered are:

- What is the total budget of the project – including costs and contributions from different sources, and what is the budget for each partner?
- What part of the budget is for local activities and what part is devoted to common activities?
- How is the project budget split between the different actions?

This information should be in your application form. You might have to re-organise your own versions of this information to fit with the application form requirements. Reaching common agreements about the project budget is an important step in the preparatory phases, and will help ensure transparency throughout the project implementation phase.¹⁶

¹⁶ A budget planning template is provided on page 19 of the Annexes that accompany the Commission's 'Guide for the implementation of the measure cooperation under the LEADER axis of rural development programmes 2007-2013'. The Annexes also include other useful templates for defining project descriptions and partner roles.



Be aware!

Income generating activities!

Some cooperation projects may lead to activities generating income. In this case, you should estimate the income and its distribution between the different partners. Each partner will then have to deal with this income according to their own RDP rules.

2.2.4 Bringing together the required resources: knowledge and technical

Besides the internal human resources that you have foreseen in your application, additional support may be available from rural networks such as:

- Regional rural networks (where they exist). These may offer advice about the content of funding applications;
- National rural networks. They may also provide funding advice as well as methodological guidance and partner search functions; and
- ENRD Contact Point facilities help with information about cooperation issues and provide on-line partners search services.



Be aware!

Do not hesitate to seek support!

If you have less TNC experience, you can also involve specialist external expert. Experts should have good knowledge of TNC methods and also useful language skills. They can give guidance during preparation stages and act as moderators during partner meetings. Contact your National/Regional Networks Support Unit for finding the right persons/institutions for support



The tools which can help you:

- ✓ Tool 3: Terms of reference and selection criteria for selecting external experts
- ✓ [Cross-Cultural Analysis for Learning Handbook](#)



Some NRNs have set up special mechanisms to support cooperation projects. In Austria and Germany in the 2007-2013 the NRN offered moderator services to LAGs who wanted to start a TNC project. These moderators were experienced in TNC approaches and their inputs usually occurred during the first meeting of potential partners. In 2014-2020 such expertise can also be organized by the LAGs themselves and paid with preparatory technical support.

2.3 Implementing TNC projects

What you have already done at this stage:

- ✓ You have confirmed your partnership;
- ✓ You have formalised the content and development of the foreseen project in the application for funding, a Memorandum of Understanding, etc., and
- ✓ You have found and brought together the required resources: human, technical, financial, etc.

Implementing a cooperation project involves numerous actions, many of which are technical and specific to individual project objectives (for instance, organising training or events, developing publications or websites, marketing new products, purchasing goods or services etc.). In many ways these are similar to the activities of other projects, not involving cooperation. In this guidance we will focus on those activities which are specific to cooperation projects, such as:



- Setting up and managing the partnership;
- Formalising the partnership;
- Activating and animating the different partners’;
- Monitoring implementation progress of a cooperation project.

Expected results:

- Understanding the different possible roles for partners and what they imply;
- Preparation of an activity plan and monitoring plan for the project;
- Cooperation partners’ sign the cooperation agreement;
- Organisation of communication activities between partners;
- Adoption of a legal structure for the partnership;
- Being prepared for activity reports and future controls;
- Carrying out the agreed project activities; and
- Producing the intended benefits.

2.3.1 Setting up and managing the cooperation partnership

Organising the partnership for TNC can sometimes be complex, due to cultural differences and/or the number of partners involved. It is therefore of crucial importance to have a highly competent project coordinator and clear rules for decision making.

Identify the project coordinator

Good management of a cooperation project is essential for its success and this should be ensured by the project coordinator. One of the partner structures should be clearly identified as the overall project leader (or lead partner). Within this lead partner structure, one person should be in overall charge of the implementation, animation, monitoring and management of the project.



Various approaches exist for TNC project coordination. These include:

- A single TNC coordinator operational throughout the full project lifespan. This person may be a representative/employee of one of the partners, chosen by the others, who accepts responsibility for the general management and coordination of the cooperation work programme;
- One variant of the above approach is to appoint a single transnational cooperation coordinator, reporting to/supported by national steering groups (this can be particularly important for projects involving a larger number of partners);
- Shared / rotating coordination. Here the partners take turns to manage and coordinate different phases or aspects of the cooperation work programme, according to predefined elements. In this case, good coordination must be ensured between the different coordinators. This may enable a certain acquisition of skills in terms of cooperation project management and coordination, notably for the less experienced partners.

The choice of coordination approach will depend on the capacity of the partners, in terms of their resources for the coordination tasks (human and financial resources) and on the preferences of the partners, as well as on the type of project.



Be aware!

Coordinating a project requires important competencies! A 'good' cooperation coordinator will preferably have:

- Language skills to communicate directly with the partners;
- Previous experience in cooperation project management or of work with external partners;
- Good project management capacities; and
- Good communication, diplomacy and negotiation skills.

Set up the decision making process

Decision-making processes should be clearly defined and described in a document validated by all partners (in the application form and in the cooperation agreement) in order to ensure transparency and to avoid any misunderstanding. This document should also refer to relevant legally binding conditions set by the Managing Authority in relation to the RDP funding.

You may choose to set up a decision-making committee (executive committee) grouping representatives of the different partners, which will be the decision-making structure for the whole project. Decisions can then be made either informally or by vote with pre-defined rules governing representation. This solution is compatible with both a unique coordinator and

with a system of shared or rotating coordination. Yet, since it implies the creation of an additional structure, it may be appropriate only for the more complex partnerships (i.e. the ones involving a higher number of partners).

2.3.2 Formalising the partnership

The cooperation agreement

The cooperation agreement is usually the main tool to specify the commitments and roles of each partner in a TNC project. A formal project cooperation agreement can be prepared and signed once the project details are clear, and the partner roles, road-map and timetable have been approved. This document is the 'contract' in which partners formally commit themselves to implement the planned actions, within the defined deadlines. This cooperation agreement is a legally binding agreement that also helps give the partnership a more official status.

Be aware!



Sign a document at an early stage!

The idea is to formalise commitment and not to explain what has happened. A formal document can be signed as soon as the project, its content and its rules of implementation are clear.

The cooperation agreement might avoid future problems!

The cooperation agreement can contribute to solve remaining questions and/or ambiguities and to clarify missing elements.

The updated [DG AGRI Guidance for implementation of LEADER Cooperation activities in Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020](#) includes an Annex presenting a generic template for a cooperation agreement.

A cooperation agreement can take many forms:

- An exchange of detailed letters where the roles, obligations and commitments of each partner is expressed. This is a simple solution but is difficult to make legally binding in case of problems;
- A cooperation protocol which should cover the same aspects as above; and
- A cooperation agreement under national law (normally of the country of the lead partner) or with a European status (e.g. EEIG) where the different articles cover all the aspects of the project implementation and the distribution of the roles (including financial data, decision making process, etc.).

Set up a common structure for the cooperation project (optional!)¹⁷

Setting up a common structure for a cooperation project is **not an obligation**, however, in some specific contexts (long-term cooperation planned even after the life-time of the specific LEADER cooperation project), the partners may choose to set up a formal structure for the implementation of the project. This means choosing an appropriate type of structure and preparing the related legal status. This option can be more relevant for cooperation projects with a longer, more complex implementation schedule and activities.

Before writing statutes, it is important to define the most suitable legal form considering the partners; the objectives; and the actions to be implemented within the cooperation project, etc. It is also important to understand the pros and cons of different legal structures.

The choice of a certain type of structure is directly linked to the project stage. It might not be necessary to envisage a 'heavy' partnership being formalised with a new structure at the very beginning of the project. A lighter form (which may even be informal, provided a cooperation agreement is clear enough about the roles and obligations of each partner) will enable the project to grow slowly and to be better defined. It is only when it is totally operational that a common structure should be adopted to formalise the partnership.

The following check list comprises questions which the partners should ask themselves before choosing a legal structure:

- Do we need to have a formalised common legal structure for the implementation of the cooperation project? What would the added value of this legal structure be for the cooperation project and the actions to be implemented? Is a complete cooperation agreement not enough?
- Which different types of legal structure exist that are recognised in all of the partners' countries?
- For each legal structure, different issues will have to be considered:
- Does the legal status match the cooperation project, the status of the partners involved and the actions to be carried out?
- What would the choice lead to in terms of further requirements (notably in terms of administrative, financial and/or control procedures)
- What would the consequences of the different legal structures be for the day-to-day implementation of the project (during its implementation and when running: notably in terms of delays and human resources)?

2.3.3 Animating a cooperation partnership

Animation activities are essential in order to keep a project doing what it is intended to do. Animation must be carefully planned and cover all project tasks. Animation roles are often assigned to project coordinators but external experts can also be contracted to animate projects. External animation contractors need skills in managing cooperation projects, in

¹⁷ 'Tool 6: Possible legal structures for cooperation' provides further information on the topic.

multicultural approaches and in moderation of relationships between partners.



Be aware!

External animation does not mean that partners do not need to get involved, on the contrary! Working with an external facilitator takes some of the work load away from the partners. Yet, the partners' must remain in charge of the project and its direction. The project should not be taken over by the facilitator. The partners therefore must stay involved to steer the implementation process and retain control of decision making processes.

In terms of animating project content, it is useful to set up working groups with responsibilities for particular parts of the project's implementation. It may be useful (and more convenient) to give responsibility for each working group to individual partners.

These working groups should operate in close collaboration with the overall coordinator, who will be responsible for collating their inputs and disseminating information about working groups' progress throughout the partnership.



Example: Targeted support to cooperation through a system of TNC coordinators: In Finland LAGs have special TNC coordinators whose role is to support the development of cooperation projects. In 2007-2013 the NRN provided information (e.g. roadshows) about the possibilities of TNC and capacity building to TNC coordinators, TNC project managers and the MA. As a result, 73% of Finnish LAGs were involved in TNC projects (they implemented 86 preparatory projects and 94 TNC projects with 21 countries for a total amount of €7.3 million)¹⁸,

Some tools and methods will help you with animation actions. Each of these is detailed below.

Write a roadmap for the cooperation project...

A common work programme, often called a 'road map', should be defined and validated. This agreed content can help ensure a smooth implementation of the project actions and provide a tool to support relationship between the partners. The coordinators should use this 'road map' as a key tool for monitoring project progress and tracking achievements. It can also be used to highlight actions that are lagging behind and encourage partners to rectify such slippage.



The road map should identify:

- the different components and steps of the cooperation project;
- the actions to be carried out for each step; and
- the responsible partners, targets and indicators for each step.

¹⁸ "[Capacity building for TNC – Finnish experiences](#)" (presentation of Juha-Matti Markkola, Milan, September 2015)



Be aware!

Cooperation takes time!

You should keep in mind, when writing the time-table, that cooperation activities often take longer than local ones. Therefore, be realistic and do not hesitate to slightly overestimate the time required for the duration of some phases of the project in order to be able to stay on the target as much as possible and avoid disappointment!

Writing the road map at an early stage helps to allow for some flexibility, by planning only major steps and not every small step that make up these major steps.

The road map should be updated, if required, to fit with any new realities that arise during the implementation phase. The consequence of each change should be well identified. Changes should be kept to a minimum in order to assist the road map's monitoring functions.

Organise meetings, visits and exchanges...

Implementing a cooperation project involving partners located far away from each other and are normally only able to communicate by e-mail or telephone, is not an easy task. In order for the cooperation to be 'real' and lead to a good exchange and tangible results, it is important to plan meetings. Indeed, face to face contact is crucial to facilitate effective project implementation and boost mutual learning opportunities.

Cooperation meetings can either be regular and short, or less frequent but longer. All will depend on the issues to be discussed, the distance between the partners, the knowledge they have and the number of partners. Whatever the type of meeting foreseen (study visits, seminars, exchange programmes, video conference etc.), it is necessary for every planned meeting to:

- Prepare the meeting well to achieve maximum efficiency;
- Be clear on what each partner will have to pay for during and after the meeting (including in terms of accommodation and meals);
- Plan what each partner should do before the meeting and what they should bring to the meeting;
- Define a clear agenda, agreed by all participants;
- Foresee that complete minutes will have to be written and distributed to all participants for their agreement;
- Foresee any language difficulty which may arise and plan professional interpretation if necessary; and
- Conclude the meeting with a short summary of what has been said and, most importantly, on the commitments which have been taken by each participant (who does what and by what deadline!)



Be aware!

Speaking a language does not mean having the skills of interpretation! Interpretation requires specific knowledge and which does not leave any time to participate actively to the meeting. You should therefore not hesitate to appoint a professional interpreter even if people in your team appear to have good language skills. If they are to be involved in the content, they will not be able to spend time acting as interpreter!

This is not necessary if there is a common language spoken sufficiently well by all participants (including the more technical projects aspects).

Organise communication between partners

In addition to meetings and the signing of documents, it is important to ensure that the partners are in regular contact, notably to understand progress in different areas and how this relates to their own work. Communication is also essential to facilitate project management, monitoring, reporting and administration.

A common communication plan should be agreed during the project planning stages. This provides a framework for regular telephone conferences, e-mail exchanges, on line and video exchanges, feedback on the actions carried out locally in the different areas, report submission deadlines etc.

Language issues can limit these regular exchanges. This issue should be foreseen and can be overcome by using translation and interpretation services or, for long terms projects, by considering language training to boost technical know-how for relevant project personnel. All important documents should be translated whenever possible.



Be aware!

Different solutions exist to facilitate the language issue!

It is indeed always possible to work with professional translators or interpreters... but you can also choose to work with language students, foreign students in the area, local residents who may be from another country, etc.

Take into account the cultural aspects of the project, of each partner

Beneficial progress can be made by embracing cultural diversity as a project strength, and harnessing it as an engine of creativity to stimulate different ideas. Problems can be transformed into opportunities by promoting open dialogue on different perspectives to common constraints.

Ensure the continuous commitment of partners to the cooperation project

All partners should be interested in the project and remain committed to participating in it, as established in the cooperation agreement. Further to this 'obligatory' commitment, it is useful to make the project a dynamic partnership in order for all participants to feel ownership, involvement, contributions and benefits from the project. This can be achieved through programmed communication actions such as organising informal events and developing common communication tools and documents.

Actions that help ease potential partnership burdens are also effective in encouraging greater participation. Agreeing standardised operating procedures and producing associated guidance (such as manuals and reporting templates) helps reduce potential misunderstandings, conflicts and inefficiencies.



Be aware!

Cooperation is both transnational AND local!

At transnational level, implementation means following the different actions, managing the project and the financial issues, evaluating the results of the project, etc.

At local level, implementation means carrying out the local actions which will feed in the cooperation project and using the results of the cooperation projects for the local development strategy.

Continuous involvement of the local actors helps to secure the link between the cooperation project and what is happening locally. This requires regular communication with local stakeholders about up to date project progress, including results of cooperation meetings and different project phases, etc.

The local cooperation think tank set up during the first steps of defining the cooperation strategy can act as a cooperation monitoring committee. If this approach is chosen, the committee should receive regular reports regarding on-going progress with each project element.

Members of the think tank/ committee could also be invited to take part in some of the project meetings and visits in order to provide an external viewpoint, and feedback on the activities carried out. These additional human inputs can create valuable benefits for all involved.

Remember...

- Do not assume that all issues are clear for all partners before they have been discussed in depth. It may therefore be better to say things twice than not at all!
- The partnership can change during the implementation phase. Hence, allow for such changes (more partners or less partners, different participants) and define from the beginning the rules for such developments.
- When cooperation partnerships involve a great number of structures, it may be useful to plan several smaller meetings rather than one big one. Yet, from time to time, it is still necessary for all partners to come together.



The tools which can help you:

- ✓ Tool 6: Possible legal forms to support the cooperation

2.3.4 Monitoring implementation progress

Monitoring of progress is an essential part of the implementation of any project, including of course a TNC project. However, monitoring of a TNC project can be slightly more complicated as it involves sharing the roles between different partners and agreeing who is responsible

for what.

Monitoring is a management tool. It refers to a process of measuring progress against the project monitoring indicators that were agreed at the project start. Monitoring indicators can measure both quantitative and qualitative information and it is essential that all partners use consistent monitoring methodologies (including common indicator definitions). You should keep in mind that:



- The same measurement systems must be used by each partner. For example, if you are aiming to create jobs you must all use the same definition for a job created (i.e. the same number of hours per week for a set number of months).
- In some cases it may be necessary to establish a baseline to measure progress against. This is often the case for qualitative targets such as improved quality of life or community confidence (for such concepts a common definition agreed by all of the project partners for the project purposes should also be developed).
- Standardised monitoring methodologies and reporting templates will enhance the effectiveness of TNC project monitoring frameworks and help facilitate efficient collation of results from all partners.

Monitoring is normally carried out internally by project partners and should occur regularly. The division of monitoring tasks (which partner monitors which activity/target) as well as the frequency for measuring progress, should also be agreed in advance by all partners.

Monitoring can confirm that a project is proceeding to plan or provide an early warning that performance is not as expected. It can help to check if the achievement of project objectives proceeds as planned. For this, it is useful to establish milestones (partial targets which are to be achieved at a specific point in time).



Be aware!

It is important that the monitoring indicators selected are SMART, meaning:

- Specific: what exactly will be measured, in which geographical area, by what unit(s)?
- Measurable: for the project to be in a position to collect information and data, what are the initial (so-called: baseline) figures?
- Achievable: what changes are anticipated as a result of the project? Are they realistic?
- Relevant: will the indicators measure all of the project's key activities?

2.4 Evaluation and Communication

2.4.1 Evaluation

Monitoring, discussed in the previous section, and evaluation occur at different stages in a TNC project. They are interlinked since monitoring provides a lot of data for evaluation. Evaluation is a tool which can be used to assess the projects process, progress and achievements and draw lessons for the future. Past experience has demonstrated the crucial role of monitoring and evaluation in:

- Steering and managing cooperation projects;
- Communicating the full set of results from cooperation, including its added-value for the local area; and
- Improving the quality of future projects by identifying good practices and sharing knowledge gained.

Evaluation findings can be used as a communication tool. The results of a TNC project evaluation can be used to demonstrate to the local population, the financial partners and to the press, the actual benefits of a European project. Such a presentation may also take the form of organising an event, together with your transnational partner(s) visiting your area.

It is extremely important to establish and implement the monitoring and evaluation process and define your indicators from the moment you start writing the project road-map/application form.

For further guidance on evaluation-related topics please consult the Evaluation Helpdesk's eLibrary at https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/publications/e-library_en_



2.4.2 Communication and dissemination of results of TNC projects

You should ensure that the benefits of your project do not stay only with those who were involved in its implementation. They should be disseminated as widely as possible across your areas and to other LAG areas who may be inspired by your example. You must also make sure that information about your project also reaches broader audiences. For this you need a wide range of dissemination and communication tools.

European cooperation can facilitate exchanges between countries and, hence, different ways of thinking. It has the potential to push further the emergence of new ideas and of new solutions for rural areas. Disseminating good practices ensures that everybody can benefit from the experiences of others. Dissemination is clearly linked to evaluation and contributes to the promotion of transnational cooperation.

Dissemination tools may be chosen depending on the target group: (potential) beneficiaries, elected representatives, press/media, general or specific public (inhabitants, business community...), etc. The way that information is presented/structured is likely to differ.

The capitalisation and dissemination of TNC project results can be undertaken using different types of tools:

- Videos about the project with interviews from stakeholders;
- Events promoting TNC projects; and
- Project fact sheets usually comprising the following elements:
 - identity - describing the profile and characteristics of the area of the lead and other partners;
 - presentation of the project objective(s);
 - project implementation methodology;
 - expected and achieved results;
 - lessons learned; and
 - transferability - what are the conditions linked to the local context? What would it take to adapt the project in another context?

Remember that NRNs and, at the EU level, ENRD can also help with the capitalisation of TNC project results and disseminating them to the relevant audiences. Indeed, many NRNs and the ENRD are on the lookout for interesting examples of successful cooperation projects, don't forget to tell them about your project!



Example: The project “**Bees and Biodiversity**” has used a number of tools to disseminate its results, including:

- a dedicated website about the project and more generally the role of bees in biodiversity, available in 7 languages,
- an awareness raising brochure about bees, addressed to farmers;
- three transnational events aimed at building skills, awareness-raising and promoting best practices, including workshops and field visits.
- a logo to promote the activities linked to bees and biodiversity and a leaflet addressed to the wider public, - a conference on the global aspects of the decline of bees¹⁹.



Be aware!

Many things have already been done, so take a look!

Do not re-do or try to re-invent what already exists! All rural networks at all levels work on capitalisation of experience. Do not hesitate to make use of relevant guidance and documents!

All actions co-financed by the European Union funds have to be publicised. Communication is crucial in this public awareness raising process for:

- stimulating interest in TNC opportunities among local actors and potential future TNC project developers/participants;
- contributing to opening up the dominant way of thinking in a territory and ‘broadening horizons’ by introducing new ideas gained during transnational relationships;
- sharing experiences, thus disseminating good practices to the other rural areas in Europe; and
- raising awareness about the potential that Europe offers, thus establishing a concrete vision of European action.

Different communication tools, messages and timings can relate to different target audiences:

| Target group | What | Which tools | When |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|
| Beneficiaries | To raise awareness about EU co-financing obtained. | Visibility methods employed include standard reference displayed on project documentation, P/R materials (incl. those addressing schools) and putting up EU flags during project presentations and project events. | Throughout project implementation and particularly when actions involve beneficiaries. |
| Potential beneficiaries | To display the potential diversity of topics that can be addressed and | P/R materials including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project FactSheet • Project Video | Throughout project implementation. |

¹⁹ <http://www.bee-leader.eu/en/common-actions>

| Target group | What | Which tools | When |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|
| | benefits achieved by TNC projects. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PressArticles • Information meetings involving cooperation operators (testimonies) | |
| Elected representatives | To raise interest in TNC: what is the added-value for their territory? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information meetings with testimonies of elected people involved in TNCprojects • Project Video | At the beginning and at the end of the project. |
| Press/media | <p>To promote TNC to the wide public by means of a concrete project example.</p> <p>To highlight the European dimension.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project FactSheet • Project Video • PressArticles | <p>When the project has achieved first tangible results.</p> <p>During an important stage of TNC project implementation (event).</p> |
| General public | To raise visibility of the European involvement in the development of rural areas. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard reference displayed on project documentation, P/R materials (incl. those addressing schools) and putting up EU flags during project presentations and project events. • Project flyer, project videos, articles in the press. | During project implementation and when presenting the project to the general public. |

Remember...

- Foresee a communication plan in your application form including a description of target groups, aims and tools/actions/timing.
- Keep your TNC project factsheet short, though understandable and precise;
- Adapt messages for dissemination to the target group.

3 Glossary

COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (CLLD)

An approach based on the experience of LEADER, involving a local partnership of public, private and NGO actors which develops and implements a local development strategy. From the period 2014-2020 CLLD can be used in four EU Funds: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Where CLLD is funded from EAFRD, the name LEADER is still used.

COOPERATION PROJECTS DATABASE

Provides a list of approved transnational cooperation projects

ENRD

The European Network for Rural Development supports the implementation of RDPs, the participation of stakeholders and the wider communication of these activities, it provides support to its members, NRNs, MAs, LAGs and other rural stakeholders through a support unit known as the Contact Point.

GOOD PRACTICE OR BEST PRACTICE DATABASE

Common tool for disseminating selected examples of good or best practices on the implementation of rural development programmes within the European Union.

INTER-TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

Means cooperation between two or more Local Action Groups from the same Member State.

LOCAL ACTION GROUP (LAG)

A broad-based local private-public partnership whose aim is to improve the long-term potential of the local area and who has the ability to define and implement a development strategy for the area. The LAG is selected to implement a local development strategy on the basis of criteria set up at the programme level by the Managing Authority.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (LDS)

A programming document drawn up and implemented by the LAG for a given area with a view to achieving the objectives of one or more of the three thematic rural development axes which should contribute to the local development.

LEADER

(From the French “Liaisons Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale”, i.e. Links between actions for the development of rural economy), LEADER is a method of rural development involving the decentralisation of decisions to the local community. It involves the creation of a local partnership (Local Action Group) which develops and implements a local development strategy (LDS) based on the local needs and opportunities. LEADER is a precursor of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). The LEADER approach under EAFRD is implemented through the LEADER Measure.

LEADER Measure

Measure 19 of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Each Managing Authority has to decide how much funding to allocate to this measure (respecting the minimum of 5% of the EAFRD allocation to the programme) and how to use it to address local needs in rural areas. The use of LEADER Measure is mandatory. It consists of four sub-measures: (i) preparatory support; (ii) implementation of operations under the local development strategies, (iii) cooperation activities (including technical preparatory support for cooperation) and (iv) running costs and animation.

MEASURES

A set of operations contributing to the implementation of rural development programmes. Managing Authorities propose at national or regional level their rural development programs, choosing those measures that best suit the needs of their rural areas and which take account of the priorities and strategies chosen in the national strategic plans on rural development.

MONITORING

This activity is carried out during the implementation of each RDP, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority and each RDP Monitoring Committee, in order to monitor programme implementation. LAGs play an important role in the monitoring of the LEADER measure (for instance by providing information on the common indicators), and they are responsible for the monitoring of the implementation of their local strategy.

MANAGING AUTHORITIES (MA)

In charge of the management of the rural development programmes, whether at National or Regional levels.

NRN

National Rural Networks have been established in each Member State under Article 54 of Regulation No 1305/2013. Their aim is to increase the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development, to improve the quality of implementation of rural development programmes, to inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities and to foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas. NRNs must have an action plan which provides i.a. for: activities regarding the provision of training and networking for local action groups and in particular technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational co-operation, facilitation of co-operation among local action groups and the search of partners.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES (RDP)

Rural Development Programmes form the basis for rural development policy within a given Member State or region. It describes how the MS/region intends to translate into action the EU's priorities for rural development for the period 2014-2020. These priorities provide the framework on the basis of the community's strategic guidelines according to which Member States have prepared their National Rural Development Programs. There are 118²⁰ RDPs for the 2014-2020 programming period (including national and regional level programmes).

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020/country-files_en

TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Transnational Cooperation or TNC means cooperation between Local Action Groups from at least two Member States among which at least one is selected under the LEADER Measure. TNC can also include cooperation of Local Action Groups from the EU-28 with similar groups in third countries following a similar approach.

TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION (TNC) GUIDANCE

The present Guidance, which aims to promote and assist transnational cooperation during the 2014-2020 programming period. The "guidance" provides practical information at the level of the cooperation project. As such it is a complement to the existing administrative guide "EC Guidance for implementation of LEADER Cooperation activities in Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020".

4 LEADER Cooperation – brief summary of EU rules and guidance²¹

4.1 Relevant EU regulations (excerpts of relevant articles)

Regulation 1303/2013 (CPR):

Art. 32 Community-led local development

(2) Community-led local development shall be: (...)

(d) designed taking into account local needs and potential, and include innovative features in the local context, networking and, where appropriate, cooperation.

CLLD and cooperation

Art. 34 Local action groups

(3) The tasks of local action groups shall include the following:

(f) selecting operations and fixing the amount of support and, where relevant, presenting the proposals to the body responsible for final verification of eligibility before approval;

Project selection
by LAGs

5) In case of cooperation activities of local action groups as referred to in point (c) of Art. 35(1), the tasks set out in point (f) of paragraph 3 of this Article may be carried out by the responsible managing authority.

Project selection
by the MA

Art. 35 Support from the European Structural and Investment Funds for community-led local development

(1) Support from the ESI Funds concerned for community-led local development shall cover:

(c) preparation and implementation of the local action group's cooperation activities;

ESI funds and
cooperation
support

Regulation 1305/2013 (EAFRD Regulation):

Art. 44 LEADER co-operation activities

(1) The support referred to in point (c) of Article 35(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 shall be granted to:

- (a) co-operation projects within a Member State (inter-territorial co-operation) or co-operation projects between territories in several Member States or with territories in third countries (transnational cooperation),
- (b) preparatory technical support for inter-territorial and transnational co-operation projects, on condition that local action groups are able to demonstrate that they are envisaging the implementation of a concrete project.

Territorial
aspects

Preparatory
support

²¹ Based on the DG AGRI guide to LEADER cooperation (GUIDANCE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LEADER CO-OPERATION ACTIVITIES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES 2014-2020 (Final version))

(2) Apart from other local action groups, the partners of a local action group under the EAFRD may be:

- (a) (a) a group of local public and private partners in a rural territory that is implementing a local development strategy within or outside the Union;
- (b) (b) a group of local public and private partners in a non-rural territory that is implementing a local development strategy.

(2) In cases where co-operation projects are not selected by the local action groups, Member States shall establish a system of ongoing application. They shall make public the national or regional administrative procedures concerning the selection of transnational co-operation projects and a list of eligible costs at the latest two years after the date of the approval of their rural development programmes.

Approval of co-operation projects by the competent authority shall take place no later than four months after the date of submission of the project application.

(4) Member States shall communicate to the Commission the approved transnational co-operation projects.

System of
ongoing
application

Approval
within four
months of

4.1.1 Summary of relevant DG AGRI guidance – key statements

- ✓ **Support for cooperation is mandatory under the LEADER measure** (must be included in the RDPs), but not mandatory at the LAG level.
- ✓ **Partners:**
 - LAGs may cooperate with partners from within and outside the European Union.
 - Partners from within the EU can be from rural and urban areas.
 - Partners do not have to fulfil all features stipulated in Article 33 of CPR (can be other than CLLD LAGs, if they are a group of public and private partners that implements a local development strategy).
- ✓ **Cooperation agreement:** A cooperation agreement is an important prerequisite for a good cooperation project.
- ✓ **Beneficiary:** The LAG can also be the final beneficiary of the support to a co-operation project.
- ✓ **Lead partner**
 - It is highly recommended (but not compulsory!) to designate a lead (or coordinating partner) for a cooperation project.
 - A lead partner can be responsible for coordinating the project preparation and implementation, steering the implementation of the project, and monitoring and communicating achievements as well.

- ✓ **Preparatory technical support**
 - is mandatory in all RDPs,
 - does not imply an obligation to later on carry out a project,
 - should not finance expenditure after the cooperation partnership has been established
- ✓ **Support for the cooperation project -**
 - is eligible for concrete activities with clearly identified deliverables or outputs
 - relevant eligibility criteria can be defined in the LDS or at RDP level
- ✓ **Financial scope**
 - Each RDP should feature a specific amount within the budget of the LEADER measure reserved for cooperation
 - If calls are organised by the MA, LAGs apply for funding on a project basis (LAGs do not have pre-allocated funds for cooperation in the LDS)
- ✓ **Selection of preparatory technical support** can be through the submission of an application to the Managing Authority or through a local selection procedure conducted by LAGs
- ✓ **Selection of cooperation projects** can be performed by the LAG (where cooperation is integrated into the Local Development Strategy) or by the Managing Authority ('ongoing' application = calls should be either permanently open or at least 3 calls a year).

5 List of `tools`

- ✓ Tool 1: Self-assessment questions to identify TNC opportunities
- ✓ Tool 2: Organising cooperation ideas into priorities
- ✓ Tool 3: Terms of reference and selection criteria for selecting external experts
- ✓ Tool 4: Checklist for meetings with partners
- ✓ Tool 5: Presenting your territory
- ✓ Tool 6: Possible legal structures for cooperation projects
- ✓ Tool 7: Roadmap for cooperation projects (template)
- ✓ Tool 8: Examples of relevant practice and templates (based on the work of the LEADER Cooperation Practitioner-Led Working Group)