

GUIDANCE ON
LEADER
LOCAL
DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY



**SELECTION
PROCESS**

Stage 2:
LDS Development



Rialtas
na hÉireann
Government
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040

Ar dTodhchaí
Tuithe
Our Rural
Future



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
Investing in Rural Areas



European Union
European Structural
and Investment Funds

Funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development

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Glossary of Terms

CAP - Common Agricultural Policy

CSP - CAP Strategic Plan

CLLD - Community Led Local Development

CPR - EU Common Provisions Regulation 2021/1060

DAFM - Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

DRCD - Department of Rural and Community Development

EAFRD - European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

EOI - Expression of Interest

EU - European Union

FP – Financial Partner

IP – Implementing Partner

LAG - Local Action Group

LCDC - Local Community Development Committee

LDS - Local Development Strategy

LEADER - Liaisons Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale

LECP - Local Economic and Community Plan

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

SWOT - Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threat

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide practical guidance and information on the development of a Local Development Strategy (LDS) to groups who qualified under Stage 1, the Expression of Interest phase, for the delivery of 2023-2027 LEADER Programme in a sub-regional area. This document will provide applicant Local Action Groups (LAGs) with an overview of the Stage 2 process and the information they need to develop and submit their LDS. Completed LDSs must be submitted no later than **Friday 14th July 2023**.

The overall aim of the Stage 2 process is to secure a high quality, coherent and inclusive LDS that effectively targets and addresses the needs and development potential of the sub-regional area through a community-led local development (CLLD) approach.

Central to the formation of the LAGs for the 2023-2027 programme will be the partnership approach, public and private interest groups coming together to deliver the programme.

The selection criteria for LAGs will be reflective of the key components for LAG composition and the will incorporate the following key elements:

- Partnership approach
- Strategic direction
- Local need, connection to the community, animation
- Governance, financial capacity

Any group wishing to form a LAG will have to clearly demonstrate these requirements.

The document is structured in 7 main sections.

Section 1. Overview of LEADER provides an overview of the LEADER programme setting out the policy context and regulatory framework for the 2023-2027 programming period and also highlighting the centrality of CLLD and the 7 Principles of LEADER.

Section 2. LEADER Themes 2023-2027 presents the thematic framework for the programme, outlining the themes, subthemes and overarching policies for this iteration of LEADER.

Section 3. Local Development Strategy (LDS) sets out the main sections and elements that each LDS must contain with the minimum requirements clearly outlined for each element.

Section 4. Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework sets out the monitoring and reporting requirements of the programme that all LAGs must comply with.

Section 5. LDS Appraisal and Selection Process presents an overview of the appraisal and selection process including the different stages of the process and the selection criteria that will be used to appraise LDSs.

Section 6. Additional Supports for LDS Development provides information on Stage 2 supports that are available to assist LAGs in developing their LDS including programme information events, draft LDS feedback service and dedicated helpdesk.

Section 7. Provisional Timeframes sets out the provisional timeframe for the LDS submission and selection process.

The **Appendices** section includes the LDS Action Plan Template, LDS Financial Plan Template and the 2023-2027 LEADER Monitoring Framework.

Section 1: Overview of LEADER

1. Overview of LEADER

The LEADER programme has been operating in Ireland and across EU Member States for over 30 years. Commencing as an experimental rural development programme in 1991, LEADER has evolved through five successive programming periods to become a key intervention within EU rural development policy. It forms an integral part of the EU funding framework, delivered through national rural development programmes of each Member State. Over the three decades of its existence, the programme has supported the development of a wide range of innovative and sustainable projects that have brought increased jobs and vibrancy to rural communities across the EU.

For the purposes of the LEADER programme in Ireland, rural areas are defined as all parts of Ireland with the exception of the areas within the boundaries of the five main cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway.

1.1 LEADER CLLD Approach and the 7 Principles of LEADER

LEADER promotes a CLLD approach that involves the participation of local communities in developing responses to key economic, environmental and social challenges.

As a CLLD approach, LEADER is a methodology that places the rural community at its centre. Groups of people representing defined geographical areas in the form of local action groups (LAGs) are charged with identifying the challenges to development in their own communities and developing initiatives to address these challenges. Through LDSs, LAGs seek to facilitate participation by all parties who wish to contribute to this process, thus ensuring that each LDS is as representative of local community needs as possible.

Article 31 of the Common Provisions Regulation 2021/1060¹ defines CLLD in the context of a Local Development Strategy stating that:

The Member State shall ensure that community-led local development is:

- a) focused on sub-regional areas;*
- b) led by local action groups composed of representatives of public and private local socioeconomic interests, in which no single interest group controls the decision-making;*
- c) carried out through strategies in accordance with Article 32;*
- d) supportive of networking, accessibility, innovative features in the local context and, where appropriate, cooperation with other territorial actors.*

The use of a CLLD approach has particular potential to benefit minority and hard to reach groups who may not necessarily engage with other local development processes. The approach is based on establishing strategic partnerships, within the sub-regional area, in the form of local action groups (LAGs). The partnership is the driving force behind the design and implementation of the LDS. The composition of the LAG is made up of public and private partners. It should be seen as a dynamic body, which adapts itself to local specificities with representatives from the economic, social, cultural and environmental sectors with no single interest group controlling the decision making process.

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021

The LDS is premised on identifying the needs and potential of the area. LAGs are tasked with designing an LDS through active consultation with local communities in their areas. A series of local objectives and strategic actions are developed to address these local priorities. CLLD approaches have the flexibility to respond to the diversity of rural areas and tailor solutions to local needs. The LEADER approach is based on a distinct methodology and includes the following seven principles:

7 Principles of the LEADER Approach

- 1) **Bottom-Up Approach** – places local communities at the centre of local development processes and is defined by consultation, participation and collective decision-making.
- 2) **Area-Based Approach** – focuses on coherent sub-regional areas and seeks to target the priorities and opportunities of the LDS area as a whole.
- 3) **The Local Partnership** – the Local Action Group (LAG) is a central element of the CLLD approach and must comprise partners from public, private and civil society.
- 4) **An integrated and multi-sectoral strategy** – the LAG and their LDS should seek to capitalise on links and synergies between different sectors in their area.
- 5) **Networking** – networking is also a central element of the LEADER approach and seeks to support networking and exchange at local, national and European levels.
- 6) **Innovation** – supporting innovative solutions to local issues.
- 7) **Co-operation** – fostering and supporting co-operation and collaboration between LAGs at national and European level.

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) has produced a comprehensive guide to the [LEADER CLLD Approach](#) including the seven Principles outlined above.

1.2 Policy and Regulatory Framework

The LEADER programme is a key intervention of *Our Rural Future*, the Government’s Policy for rural development launched in 2021, which aims to deliver a wide range of actions to rural communities over the lifetime of the policy.

Ireland’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is supported by two funds drawn from the EU’s multiannual financial framework budget for the years 2021 to 2027– the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

LEADER is governed by EU framework regulations. The [Common Provisions Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060](#) is a single rulebook that lays down the financial and common provisions applicable that governs eight EU funds. Articles 31 – 34 of the Common Provisions Regulations (CPR) 2021/1060 provide the regulatory framework for the administration of the LEADER Programme in so far as the sub-regional areas, LAGs and LDSs are concerned. The [CAP Strategic Plan \(CSP\) Regulation 2021/2115](#)² is the key governing regulation for the programme setting out provisions relating to activities to be funded, coordination and governance as well as monitoring, reporting and evaluation requirements.

² Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021

For the period 2023-2027, the CSP will be built around nine Specific Objectives.

Specific Objectives of CAP 2023-2027

- 1. Fair Income** - support viable farm income and the resilience of the agricultural sector.
- 2. Competitiveness** - enhance market orientation and increase farm competitiveness.
- 3. Food Chain** - improve the position of farmers in the food value chain.
- 4. Climate Change Action** - contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 5. Environmental Care** - foster sustainable development and efficient management of natural resources such as water, soil and air.
- 6. Landscapes and Biodiversity** - contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, enhance ecosystem services and preserve habitats and landscapes.
- 7. Generational Renewal** - attract and sustain young farmers and new farmers and facilitate sustainable business development in rural areas.
- 8. Vibrant Rural Areas** - promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry.
- 9. Food and Health** - improve the response of EU agriculture to societal demands on food and health.

LEADER is cross linked specifically to Objective 8 as set out above

Specific Objective 8 focuses on promoting growth and jobs in rural areas, developing the rural and bio-economies, digitising the rural economy, and promoting social inclusion. While the Specific Objective references forestry, it should be noted that forestry is listed as an ineligible activity for LEADER support in Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan as agreed with the EU Commission.

The coherence and consistency between local strategies and existing national, regional or sub-regional strategies including sectoral ones must be ensured. Accordingly, the key national policies that provide the overarching policy context for this LEADER programming period include the *CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025* and Ireland's *Climate Action Plan 2023*. At EU level, these include the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, the *European Green Deal*, the *EU's Rural Action Plan* and the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights. This overarching policy context is presented in further detail in Section 2.

1.3 Defining Roles

For the 2023-2027 programme period, LEADER will be positioned within a defined framework for development and implementation. It is important to define the roles of those organisations that will have a formal role in the LEADER elements of the CAP Strategic Plan.

Managing Authority

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is the Managing Authority for Ireland's CSP and has the primary responsibility for the implementation of all aspects of Ireland's CSP.

The management of the LEADER element of the CAP Strategic Plan has been delegated to the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) Delegated Paying Agent

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) is responsible for the implementation of the LEADER programme. DRCD is responsible for ensuring that the systems and processes that support this function are compliant with all regulatory requirements. This includes, amongst other things, monitoring LAG compliance with financial management and decision-making requirements, for example through the annual performance review and annual planning process. In addition, DRCD is responsible for the on-going checks and controls in respect of LAG expenditure, together with the payment of all project and administration expenditure to the LAGs.

Local Action Group (LAG)

Article 33 of the EU Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) 2021/1060 outlines the roles of LAGs. LAGs are tasked with developing the LDS and implementing, with their partner organisations, the actions contained within the strategy. Thus, the LAG is responsible for animation, capacity building, managing calls for projects, decision-making on local projects that are awarded funding and the financial management and monitoring of projects and the overall LDS. LAGs will report directly to DRCD on financial elements and to DRCD and/or its agent's on the oversight of the LEADER monitoring framework.

The activities of each LAG will include working and engaging with rural communities with a view to identifying and progressing innovative projects that enhance the viability and sustainability of that community. There will be a strong animation focus on areas which have not benefited from LEADER financial support in the past.

The LAGs engagement with all sectors of society in a sub-regional area will be crucial for the development phase of its LDS as well as its implementation and must include the seven principles of LEADER. In that regard, the membership of the LAG will include a broad range of local public and private interests in order to secure the LAGs effective operation, and in doing so, reflect the objectives of its LDS.

Implementing Partner

LAGs may decide that a partner will have a more operational role in the delivery of LEADER and will be designated as an implementing partner in the local context. The implementing partner may be responsible for undertaking distinct tasks within LEADER (e.g. animation, administering calls for projects, financial management), with management oversight provided by the LAG. The specific tasks that are delegated to the implementing partner are at the discretion of the LAG and should be documented in a Service Level Agreement between the parties. A LAG may have more than one Implementing Partner.

Animating Partner

The Implementing Partner may work closely with an Animating Partner to assist with animation of the strategy and capacity building in their area. The tasks assigned to the Animating Partner should be documented in a Service Level Agreement between the parties.

Promoter

A 'promoter' is an individual or grouping that applies to a LAG to access funding through LEADER. All projects that are approved by the LAG must be aligned with a local objective in the LDS. The LAG and /or its Implementing Partner or Animating Partner can also apply for LEADER funding as a project promoter.

Pobal

Pobal will provide ongoing technical and administrative support to the Department to support it in its role as the delegated paying agent for LEADER. In the preparatory stages this will involve Pobal providing technical support to conduct and manage the LDS application and selection process and to design and implement the ICT system for the ongoing management of LEADER interventions.

Section 2: 2023-2027 LEADER Themes

The LEADER element of the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 outlines a series of themes that were identified as part of research and consultations undertaken in developing the plan. These themes are reflective of the key challenges and opportunities facing rural Ireland. Each theme is given further definition through a number of sub-themes, which reflect the key areas that require the most support and have the greatest potential to promote the sustainable development of rural communities. The sub-themes are considered to be sufficiently broad and flexible to encompass the diversity of local needs in rural areas and the range of projects supported through the LDS.

Each LDS will be required to examine the themes and sub-themes within the LDS process and in the context of an integrated regional and local planning approach. While it is not mandatory to include all of the themes and sub-themes in the LDS, the themes will assist LAGs to respond freely to the emerging needs as identified during the development of its LDS. The themes and sub-themes included in the LDS must reflect the actions that emerge in consultation with the communities when it is being developed and must demonstrate how the LDS will contribute to identified local needs and priorities, the aims of the CSP and in particular to Specific Objective 8 as outlined in the previous section. The exclusion of any of the themes should be evidenced through the outcome of the consultation process and should be detailed in the LDS.

2023-2027 LEADER Themes
<i>Theme 1: Economic Development and Job Creation</i>
<i>Theme 2: Rural Infrastructure and Social Inclusion</i>
<i>Theme 3: Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation</i>

2.1 Theme 1: Economic Development and Job Creation

The need to support the development of the rural economy has been identified as a focus for rural development.

Sub-theme 1a. The Green Economy: Significant potential for employment opportunities for rural areas are presented by the green economy. There is a strong need to maximise the opportunities presented by the circular and bio economy with Ireland being in a particularly favourable position to develop its bio and circular economies because of its abundance of natural advantages.

Sub-theme 1b. Agricultural Diversification: In the context of enterprise development, and in line with the overall aims of the CAP Strategic Plan specific focus is placed on diversification opportunities for farm families. Entrepreneurial use of farm resources for non-agricultural purposes, for example, farm shops, recreational activities, etc.

Sub-theme 1c. Rural Tourism & Recreation: Tourism plays a very significant role in the rural economy and it is essential that Ireland continues to develop its tourism sector in a sustainable way. Areas such as outdoor rural recreation, outdoor activities, cultural and heritage initiatives, festivals, and other events have all been identified as areas of significant potential that would benefit from investment in order to contribute to the sustainable development of rural tourism.

Sub-theme 1d. Enterprise Development: There exists a strong need to facilitate business development in rural areas by providing opportunities and support to businesses and individuals looking to develop rural enterprises. Within this area of support, increased focus should be given to supporting female entrepreneurs in rural communities.

Sub-theme 1e. Rural Food Production: Ireland has seen considerable growth and expansion in the artisan food sector over the past decade. The LEADER programme is well positioned to continue to support this sector with investment in artisan and micro, small and medium food producers to develop and expand rural food production, skills development and marketing.

Sub-theme 1f. Social, Community & Cooperative Enterprises: Social Enterprises are enterprises whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact rather than maximising profits for their owners. *Our Rural Future* identifies social enterprises as an important part of local economies in rural areas often filling gaps in markets that are not attractive to commercially focused companies due to low population densities or economies of scale.

2.2 Theme 2: Rural Infrastructure & Social Inclusion

A central focus will be the need to ensure the social cohesion of a sub-regional area i.e. not just to support economic development but also to support social inclusion. Rural Ireland is becoming increasingly diverse and it is important to embrace this diversity ensuring that future community development recognises the needs of all members of society.

Sub-theme 2a. Rural Infrastructure: Measures to develop and/or enhance rural infrastructures, in order to provide an opportunity for more people to live and work in their rural communities.

Sub-theme 2b. Accessible Services: Improve access to services for rural dwellers and increase social inclusion for people living in remote rural areas and groups who are at risk of social exclusion, inter alia hard to reach and new communities.

Sub-theme 2c. Optimising Digital Connectivity: Digital connectivity is now fundamental to the development of rural areas, with the COVID-19 pandemic highlighting the importance of digitalisation in supporting so many aspects of our daily lives. As well as the requirement for good IT infrastructure and connectivity, supporting the development of digital skills and digital literacy is also essential to enable rural dwellers to maximise the benefits of digitalisation.

Sub-theme 2d. Rural Youth: Gaps exist in the diversity of activities available in rural areas for young people, outside of sports. There is a need to encourage rural youth participation in issues that affect their daily lives, to build their leadership capabilities and to provide on-going input to the development of future rural youth initiatives.

2.3 Theme 3: Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

While recognising that sustainable development, climate change mitigation and adaptation is a cross-cutting issue and in this context will be considered for all LEADER interventions, a number of specific areas are identified under this theme.

Sub-theme 3a. Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment: Support to encourage protection and sustainable use of water resources, protection and improvement of local biodiversity and development of renewable energy.

Sub-theme 3b. Climate Change Capacity Building: Create greater awareness and engagement around climate change and foster the development of a greater range of local responses to climate change.

Sub-theme 3c. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation: Providing support that encourages and complements climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives.

2.4 Overarching Policy Context

In addition to the themes and sub-themes outlined above, there are a range of specific policy programmes and agendas that provide an overarching policy context for the 2023-2027 period. This policy context includes regional, national and international interventions and commitments in key areas such as climate action, equality and inclusion and sustainable rural development models, as outlined below.

LAGs will be required to demonstrate how their LDS aligns with and responds to this overarching policy context. This will include providing information and evidence of how these policy agendas have informed the development of their LDS in terms of their consultation processes and also in the setting of local objectives and the development of the LDS Action Plan.

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

Our Rural Future provides a whole-of-government policy for rural Ireland. It sets out an ambitious vision for thriving rural communities centred on balanced regional development, employment opportunities and vibrant, inclusive communities. Some of the key areas of focus for *Our Rural Future* include investing in employment and entrepreneurship; optimising digital connectivity; revitalising rural towns and villages; and supporting the transition to a climate neutral economy.

Sustainable Development Goals

At the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality and support economic growth; all while tackling climate change.

Climate Change Mitigation

The European Green Deal seeks to transform Europe into the world's first climate neutral continent by 2050. Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2023 shares the vision, commitments and targets of the European Green Deal and seeks to set Ireland on a path to becoming a cleaner, greener, more sustainable economy and society.

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

The European Union is built on fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union provides that:

"The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail".

EU action in this area is based on the EU Treaties and on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Charter enshrines the fundamental rights people enjoy in the EU. It is a comprehensive instrument

protecting and promoting people's rights and freedoms in the light of changes in society, social progress and scientific and technological developments.

Smart Villages Concept

Smart Villages has become an increasingly central concept and delivery model in European rural development policy in recent years. The concept implies the active participation of local communities in improving their economic, social and environmental conditions through innovative and collaborative initiatives and often with a focus on utilising digital technologies and the solutions and efficiencies that they can bring to communities. The preparation and implementation of Smart Village strategies supported will be a result indicator for this programme.

EU Long-term Vision for Rural Areas

Under the EU Long-term Vision for Rural Areas, the European Commission has set out a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas up to 2040 which identifies areas of action towards stronger, better connected, more resilient and prosperous rural communities.

Central to this long-term vision are the **Rural Pact** and the **EU Rural Action Plan**. The Rural Pact provides a framework for cooperation on rural matters between public authorities, civil society, businesses, academia and citizens at European, national, regional and local levels. The EU Rural Action Plan seeks to compliment and strengthen existing EU policies related to rural development and is articulated around a range of flagship initiatives in areas such as sustainable transport, digitalisation, economic diversification and climate change mitigation.

Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP)

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for the creation of a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) in each local authority area. The purpose of the LECP is to set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant local authority area, both by itself directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders. The LAG should outline in the LDS how the proposed actions align with the LECP (or draft LECP) for their area; demonstrating how these actions will help to deliver on the priorities and objectives of the Plan.

Further sources of information on all of the above policy agendas are provided in Section 6.5, Useful Resources.

Section 3: The Local Development Strategy (LDS)

3.1 Overview

As a Community Led Local Development (CLLD) initiative, the LEADER programme is designed to engage, resource and enable local communities to manage local development in their areas. Central to this process is the LDS, which must be developed by a LAG. The LDS is a community-led plan designed in partnership with the local community to achieve a collective vision and support the sustainable development of the LDS area.

LAGs have until **Friday 14th July 2023** to submit an LDS for their area. Completed LDSs can be submitted for assessment ahead of that date in order to facilitate the delivery of projects on the ground at the earliest stage possible. However, in areas where more than one applicant group was successful in Stage 1 of the selection process, assessment of the LDS will only commence once all strategies for the sub-regional area have been submitted.

The LDS should promote linkages between local development actions. Rather than presenting a list of disconnected projects, strategies should be integrated in terms of coherent links between actions or projects based on clearly identified needs or opportunities. The projects selected locally should all contribute to the objectives of the LDS, should complement each other and not have contradictory aims. Article 32 of the CPR (2021/1060) sets out the elements that need to be included in the LDS.

The Department of Rural and Community Development has developed a framework for the LDS in terms of its structure and content. The framework is based on six main elements as outlined below.

LEADER 2023-2027 LDS Framework
1. Local Action Group Governance Model
2. LDS Area Profile
3. CLLD and Participative Planning
4. Strategic Integration
5. LDS Action Plan
6. LDS Financial Plan

The LDS Framework provides an overview of the main elements that each LDS must contain. Each of these elements is explained in this section and the minimum requirements clearly outlined for each. While the LDS Framework is not intended to be overly prescriptive about how LAGs develop their LDS, it should be noted that the framework and its requirements are linked to the LDS appraisal process (see *Section 5. LDS Appraisal and Selection Process* for full details). It is therefore important to adhere to the content required under the framework when developing an LDS.

3.1.1 Format of the LDS

The LDS must be produced and presented as a written document that covers the period 2023-2027, with the Financial Plan covering the period 2023-2029 to take account of the period required for the closure of the programme. In addition to providing the content required under the LDS Framework, the document must also comply with the following requirements:

- Maximum page length is 100 pages (excluding appendices) in Arial 11pt font.
- Appendices should only be included where absolutely necessary, with a limit of 30 pages in total.
- The document can be produced in English or Irish.
- Submitted electronically in pdf format.
- The document should be well presented and structured for ease of reading and appraisal using a table of contents including page numbers, glossary, chapters or sections and numbered paragraphs.

Instructions for submitting the LDS document are detailed in *Section 6. Additional Supports for LDS Development*.

3.2 Local Action Group Governance Model

Local Action Groups are entities established with the sole purpose of delivering the LEADER programme in a defined area. The LDS must provide an overview of the LAG setting out its membership and how the LAG is structured and operates. The focus here is to demonstrate that the LAG has the required management, financial and organisational capacity to effectively manage and implement the LDS.

3.2.1 LAG Composition

The composition of the LAG partnership must be based on balanced representation from the public and private sector, as per Article 33 of the EU Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) 2021/1060. Central to the formation of the LAGs for the 2023-2027 programme will be the partnership principle with public and private interest groups coming together to deliver the programme.

While the membership of the decision making body of the LAG is drawn from both public and private local socio-economic interest groups, no single interest group can control the decision-making process. The LAG must ensure that its membership is managed proactively at all times to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and that there is a wide range of local interests represented.

The LAG decision-making body is tasked with including a broad range of local actors such as, but not limited to, representatives of local non-governmental organisations, local development companies, development agencies, local community-based groups, marginalised communities, youth organisations, cultural bodies, sporting bodies, social movements, networks and relevant public bodies. Each LAG must aim to secure a balanced gender representation.

LAG decision-making members may also be members of other local decision making bodies such as a local community development committee (LCDC), a local development company (LDC), state body or local authority. However, each member of the LAG decision-making body holds equal status on the LAG.

In order to assess the inclusiveness of a LAG's decision-making body, the Commission has published an [Implementing Regulation \(2022/1475\)](#) as regards the evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plans and the provision of information for monitoring and evaluation. Detailed information on LAGs and their activities, as laid out in Annex VII of that regulation shall be reported in 2026 and 2030.

In addition, as highlighted in the previous section, the selected LAGs for the 2023-2027 LEADER programme must respect the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights and the general principles of European Union law.

3.2.2 LAG Roles and Responsibilities

The specific roles and responsibilities of the LAG and its members are set out in the Common Provisions Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060), Article 33. The LAG is responsible for programme animation and engaging with communities in their area; capacity building; managing calls for projects proposals; decision-making on projects and subsequent monitoring and financial management. The LAG is also responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and its animation.

As part of the LDS, the LAG is required to outline the roles and responsibilities of LAG members. In some scenarios, the LAG may decide that a member partner will have a more operational role in the delivery of LEADER locally and will be designated as an Implementing Partner. The onus is on the LAG to ensure that the Implementing Partner (if applicable), has the required experience and capacity to effectively manage the specific tasks which have been delegated to it. In cases where a LAG chooses to utilise the expertise of partner organisations as outlined here, the LAG is required to clearly outline in the LDS the separation of duties and the roles and responsibilities of the LAG and any partners with specific implementation tasks.

Regarding staff that will be assigned to LEADER, the key roles outlined in the job description, must reflect the required skills to manage and implement the LDS. This should include CLLD skill sets to support the required animation work, the logistical and financial management of all relevant development processes and to support the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the LDS.

3.2.3 Governance and Conflict of Interest

Article 33(3) (b) CPR 2021/1060 sets out that LAGs implement a non-discriminatory and transparent selection procedure and criteria, which avoids conflicts of interest and ensures that no single interest group controls selection decisions.

Within the LDS, it is important for the LAG to outline how they propose to address any potential conflict of interest in an open and transparent way, as this is critical to the decision-making process at a local level. The Operating Rules when developed will specifically address the area of Governance, with a particular emphasis on managing and mitigating the potential for conflicts of interest amongst the membership to influence LAG decisions.

LAG Overview – Minimum Requirements to be included in the LDS	
Organisation Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal Name of LAG, Business Name (if applicable) • Postal Address, Telephone No., Email Address, Website
Legal/Company Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRO No. and Tax Clearance Certificate • Legal Structure i.e. Company Limited by Guarantee with/without share capital, public-private partnerships e.g. committee structure etc.
LAG Composition & Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of proposed LAG decision-making members – name, organisation, areas of expertise. • Outline of the selection process for new LAG decision-making members and how it is proposed to rotate LAG decision-making members over the course of the LEADER programme. • Gender breakdown of LAG decision-making members and how the LAG will ensure its membership contains a broad range of local public and private interests in order to secure the LAGs effective operation. • Description of decision-making structures/procedures including its Independent Evaluation Committee, subgroups etc.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed Implementing Partners and Animating Partners (if relevant) governance and decision arrangements.
LAG Roles & Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roles & responsibilities of LAG, Implementing Partner and Animating Partner staff for LEADER regarding financial management; administration; animation and calls for proposals; management of staff; monitoring and evaluation.
LAG Financial Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial and budgetary controls along with management procedures for the LEADER programme. Procedures for oversight of the LAGs financial and Implementing Partner and Animating Partner (if applicable). Adherence to public procurement requirements. Confirmation of the LAGs 'Financial Partner' (if applicable) for the LEADER programme and how the system will operate. Recent auditors report confirming that the LAG and any partners have up to date and adequate procedures in place for dealing with governance, conflict of interest and financial matters.
LEADER Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed number of full-time equivalents (FTEs) in the LAG, Implementing Partner(s) and Animating Partners (if relevant) Proposed salary for each staff post and basis for salary calculation (e.g. professional qualifications and years of experience). Organisational chart illustrating the proposed management & staffing structure of the LAG, Implementing Partner(s) and Animating Partner (if applicable) Job descriptions, competencies professional qualifications and skills to generate and manage LAG/project development processes on a local level for each role. Qualifications of staff assigned to animate and capacity build and manage climate, environment and biodiversity projects. Knowledge of staff in procurement, State Aid and other national and EU requirements. Each role identified must show how it contributes specifically in the administration of the LEADER programme.
Project Selection Procedures for LEADER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedure for managing the appraisal and selection process for project promoters to ensure a transparent selection procedure. Project selection criteria and scoring framework.
Relevant Experience	<p>Details of any previous experience of the LAG partner organisations in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing and administering calls for projects to local promoters. Developing area-based approaches to rural and community development Delivering projects that target hard to reach communities and areas not previously in receipt of funding Management of relevant Exchequer or EU funding in the last 3 years. Leveraging additional match funding from other EU/national sources. Programme monitoring and evaluation experience and procedures. Risk management procedures.
Appendices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governing documents of the LAG (if applicable). Operational Procedures: a list of key procedure/policies of LAG that are currently in place for the operation of the organisation. Job descriptions for LEADER staff members of the LAG or LAG partner(s), including the required level of experience, hours and salary scales.

3.3 LDS Area Profile

The LDS must clearly define its geographical area and present a socio-economic profile for that area. The profile must include evidence of the collection and analysis of relevant statistical data and research relating to the local area, identify key trends and issues that were explored as part of the public consultation and overall strategy development process.

3.3.1 Defining the LDS Area

For the purposes of the programme, rural areas are defined as all parts of Ireland with the exception of the areas within the boundaries of the five main cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway.

The sub-regional areas for the delivery of the 2023-2027 LEADER programme are aligned with county boundaries³. In keeping with the nature of the LEADER programme, flexibility will be provided to eligible groups that wish to submit a LDS that covers all or part of the sub-regional area. Flexibility will also be provided to eligible groups that wish to submit multiple LDSs to cover parts of different sub-regional areas.

The off-shore islands will be aligned with their relevant sub-regional area. In recognition of the particular needs and priorities of the Island communities a number of important provisions are included in the model for the new programme.

Any LAGs selected in an area that includes island communities will be required to identify in their LEADER strategy specific actions developed in consultation with the island communities themselves and include an indicative budget to implement such actions.

In addition, a representative of the island grouping, in each sub-regional area, must be included in the decision-making body of the LAG.

LAGs are required to provide a map depicting the geographical area covered by the LDS. A list of Electoral Divisions (EDs) and/or Small Areas (SAs) within the LDS area should also be included where it is proposed that the LDS will not cover the full sub-regional area. It is preferable that the area is made up of complete SAs i.e. the LDS should not seek to split SAs.

A brief description of the area covered should also be included in the LDS, in terms of its size, landscape, accessibility, infrastructure, economic and social imbalances and any other defining features. The population covered by each LDS must be submitted also. This data must be confirmed by official census 2022 data (or the latest available), as it is a result indicator to be reported to the European Commission.

3.3.2 Socio-Economic Profile

As part of the overall Area Profile, the LDS should provide a detailed socio-economic profile of the area at the most recent point in time, through presenting relevant socio-economic data and research.

³ The exceptions to this are in counties Cork with 3 sub-regional areas (North, South and West) and Dublin with one sub-regional area (Dublin Rural) that encompasses the rural areas of County Dublin in the three Local Authority areas.

The relevant data can be obtained from the use of Official Statistics, Pobal Maps reports, secondary research as well as other information available at a local level. As far as possible LAGs should utilise existing research in this regard. LAGs are not expected to commission new pieces of research for the LDS, unless this is considered to be of strategic importance to the overall planning process.

As part of the socio-economic profile the LDS will outline the current position in the area in respect of the main socio-economic indicators (economic activity, labour market, demographic) and identify if it differs from the national trend. Any other significant changes that have occurred should be identified and compared to the national picture (if relevant) e.g. a marked decrease in employment for a particular business sector.

The LEADER intervention will specifically contribute to Specific Objective 8 as contained in Article 6 (1) (h) of the CAP SP Regulation 2021/2115, with identification of needs focusing on the demography in rural areas, employment, growth and social inclusion. Finally, when developing the Area Profile the LDS should also consider the overall policy objectives for the 2023-2027 LEADER programme and what opportunities and challenges these may present for their area.

In presenting the Area Profile there will be an expectation to provide some concise analysis of the information being presented and to draw some critical conclusions that can inform the priority areas of focus for the LDS such as;

- key gaps to be addressed;
- the strengths and opportunities for development in the area;
- consideration of disadvantaged groups as set out under the EU Charter for Fundamental Rights such as women, young people, older people, people with disabilities and new communities.

3.3.3 Useful Resources for Developing an Area Profile

The Official Statistics produced by the [Central Statistics Office \(CSO\)](#) covers a range of themes that are relevant to LEADER, including demography, labour market, population, business sectors, education, social conditions and environment & climate.

The [Pobal HP Deprivation Index](#) is a useful resource to help LAGs identify the greatest concentrations of disadvantage at Small Area level. The Index measures the relative disadvantage of a geographical area using Census data. The Index provides relevant data relating to population change; age dependency; lone parent ratio; education levels; unemployment rate and proportion living in Local Authority rented accommodation.

[Pobal Maps](#) provides a visual representation at Small Area level and is a useful tool for area targeting. It allows users to run thematic reports to a number of different boundary levels and users can run multiple themes simultaneously in order to cross-reference data.

The [All-Island Research Observatory \(AIRO\)](#) offers a range of online information including Census reporting, the Pobal HP Deprivation Index, and public services/accessibility to regional and local Authority area level.

LDS Area Profile – Minimum Requirements to be included in the LDS	
Area Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define and describe the proposed geographical area to be covered, including its population, by the LDS
Socio-Economic Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present an up-to-date socio-economic profile of the area using relevant statistical data and research.
Area Needs Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concise analysis of relevant data paying attention to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the current position, (b) significant changes, (c) summary of the key conclusions including the identification of key gaps; potential areas/priorities for development; and consideration of disadvantaged groups LAGs must identify those areas and communities in the LDS area that have to date benefited least from LEADER interventions. They must also demonstrate clearly in the LDS and its Action Plan how these areas and communities will be prioritised. Demonstrate that the needs analysis is based on up-to-date evidence-based research, data and consultations.
Appendices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map of the LDS area with a list of the EDs and/or SAs and reference to disadvantaged areas.

3.4 CLLD and Participative Planning

Community-led local development (CLLD) is a tool for involving citizens at local level in developing responses to the social, environmental and economic challenges we face today. CLLD is an approach that requires time and effort, but for relatively small financial investments, it can have a marked impact on people's lives and generate new ideas and the shared commitment for putting these into practice.

The LDS is required to be developed and implemented through a clear CLLD approach, which is premised on local consultation and active participation of the local community. This engagement includes the general population, area-based, sectoral and interest groups and representatives from the statutory, community and voluntary and private sectors. For the purposes of the 2023-2027 LEADER programme, there is to be an increased priority focus on increased engagement on those areas within the LDS area that have not previously benefitted from LEADER investment and evidence of this must be presented in the LDS.

In the context of addressing social exclusion and the commitment of LEADER to meeting its obligations under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, it is essential that people living in disadvantaged areas and those from marginalised groups are actively engaged in the process. Adopting a CLLD approach enables the local community to identify the needs of the area whilst also having an input into the type of actions that might be delivered through the LDS. Applicant LAGs should familiarise themselves with the published guidance on CLLD approaches and participative planning referenced in this document and summarised in Section 6.5, Useful Resources.

The community-led approach also underpins the implementation of the LDS. It is important that LAGs develop a process to enable the ongoing participation of the local community in the roll out of the LDS.

3.4.1 Public Consultation

The LEADER CLLD approach requires that an open and inclusive public consultation process is undertaken as a core element of developing the LDS. The purpose of the consultation is to promote the active participation of the local community in identifying the challenges and opportunities for the local area and reflect on the themes and subthemes of the 2023-2027 LEADER programme.

As specified in the CAP Strategic Plan, there must be a strong animation and capacity building focus on those areas within the LDS area that have not benefited from LEADER financial support in the past. There must also be strong and demonstrable focus on proactively engaging with marginalised and socially excluded groups. The LDS should outline how the LAG proposes to ensure such areas benefit from LEADER investment in the 2023 – 2027 LEADER programme.

In areas that include off-shore islands the LDS must outline the public consultation that has taken place with the relevant island communities.

The public consultation process must facilitate broad representation from key stakeholder groups that include sectoral groups such as agriculture, food, crafts, rural tourism, local services; local community groups; local statutory, community & voluntary and private sector organisations; area-based and interest groups; and social partners. It is important for the group developing the LDS to utilise appropriate and effective methodologies for engaging with marginalised and ‘hard to reach’ communities in order to support their participation. LAGs will be expected to outline what marginalised communities they engaged directly with as part of their LDS consultations and how they engaged with these groups.

For assistance in this regard, please refer to two recently published resources in particular designed to provide practical guidance for achieving inclusive community consultation processes – [Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership](#) and [Resource Guide on Inclusive Community Engagement in Planning and Decision Making](#).

Relevant and up-to-date research findings and information from broader consultation processes which may have been conducted at a local level may also be used to supplement the public consultation process.

3.4.2 SWOT Analysis

The local development strategy should be drawn up based on a *SWOT analysis* (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), and the identification of local needs. The objectives of the strategy should address those needs and set concrete measurable objectives, focusing on long-term development to solve specific development challenges in the area. Both the SWOT and the development of the strategy should be undertaken in a participative fashion to ensure community involvement and ownership of the strategy.

3.4.3 Setting the LDS Priorities

It is important that the ranking of priorities and objectives is ‘evidence-based’ and premised on the findings of the area profile and public consultation and a reflection on themes and sub themes of the programme. In line with the community-led approach, the decision-making should be based on an open and transparent process. This prevents a scenario whereby a strategy could be seen to pursue the interests of a particular sector or group or not to reflect the themes and sub themes set out in the CSP.

The LDS is not required to address all of the LEADER Themes and Sub-themes as outlined in Section 2 of this document. However, the LAG is required to provide a brief overview of how the local objectives proposed in the LDS were prioritised and agreed and how other areas were discounted as areas of focus.

CLLD and Participative Planning – Minimum Requirements to be included in the LDS	
Public Consultation	<p>Overview of the consultation process, in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and types of consultation events held and an indication of levels of participation at these consultation events • Inclusive process that involved key stakeholders e.g. local community, relevant sector/interest groups and disadvantaged groups with a specific focus on the priorities and groups identified above. • Engagement with the off-shore island communities, if relevant. • Multi-sector approach that involves co-ordination with relevant sectors e.g. economic, social, cultural and environmental. • Specific methodologies for engaging with more difficult to reach groups. • Summary of the outcome regarding the key findings and areas/themes for local development.
SWOT Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of the individuals/organisations, including the geographical areas, who participated in the SWOT analysis. Applicants should ensure that all areas of the LDS catchment area are covered. • Outcome of the SWOT analysis in relation to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
LDS Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline how each theme has been considered for inclusion in the strategy and for those that are not reflected, how and why this decision was reached. • Outline of the process that was undertaken to agree the priorities and objectives of the LDS. • Rationale for the proposed themes/sub-themes and priorities that the LDS is focusing on. • Rationale, if applicable, for the exclusion of themes/sub-themes not included in the LDS.

3.5 Strategic Integration

The LDS should clearly demonstrate how it contributes to Specific Objective 8 - Article 6(h) of CAP Strategic Plan Regulation 2021/2115:

“promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry”

The LDS is one of a broad range of strategies targeted at local and rural development. In order to achieve integrated and co-ordinated approaches to local development, it is important that the LDS demonstrates how it aligns with the LEADER themes and sub-themes and the overarching policy context outlined in Section 2. While the Specific Objective references forestry it should be noted that

forestry is listed as an ineligible activity for LEADER support in the CAP Strategic Plan as agreed with the EU Commission.

At local and regional level, key policies that the LDS must consider and seek to align with include the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)/draft LECP, County Development Plan (CDP)/draft CDP, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) and other sectoral strategies at a local level, which may be directly relevant to the LDS.

At national level, some of the key policies that the LDS must consider and seek to align with include; *Our Rural Future*, Project Ireland 2040, Climate Action Plan 2023, Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 and Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities.

At an EU and international level, the LDS must demonstrate alignment with the goals and objectives of central policies including, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the European Green Deal, the EU's Long Term Vision for Rural Areas and the EU Charter for Fundamental Rights.

Networking and Co-operation

Networking provides an opportunity for LAGs to disseminate learning, encourage innovation and good practice emanating from the LDS and the local projects who have been awarded LEADER funding. The interrelationships developed through networking can also help to forge synergies between LAGs and may lead to collaborative projects.

As part of the LDS, LAGs are required to provide an outline of their proposed participation in networking structures at local, national and/or international level.

In addition, under the co-operation principle, LEADER LAGs are encouraged to actively engage in relevant networks in Ireland and the EU CAP Networks. Support for LEADER co-operation activities is provided for under Article 77 in the [CAP Strategic Plan \(CSP\) Regulation 2021/2115](#). Under the 2023-2027 LEADER programme, the selection of all types of projects will be exclusively the LAGs responsibility. This approach enables the LAGs to target support to the objectives of the strategy and facilitate coordination of projects with partners from other LAG areas/jurisdictions.

The criteria for selection of co-operation projects such as, inter-territorial/transnational, to be funded both in the context of preparing and implementing a co-operation project will be detailed in the LEADER Operating Rules for the programme and the need to support this kind of intervention must be identified in the LDS.

Strategic Integration – Minimum Requirements to be included in the LDS	
Broader Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate the strategic alignment of the LDS with relevant local, regional, national, EU level strategies/policies. LAGs are required to prioritise and outline what they see as the most important strategies/policies and provide a brief synopsis that identifies the key policy objectives within each that are relevant to the LDS.
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview of the LAGs proposed participation in local, regional, national and international networking structures that will be used to share learning and good practice in relation to LEADER.
Co-operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline and explain how the LAG's proposed co-operation activity fits into the broader LDS vision

3.6 LDS Action Plan

The LDS must contain an Action Plan. An LDS Action Plan Template has been developed and is provided as Appendix 1 of this document. The action plan presents an outline of how the LAG proposes to address the needs and utilise the development potential of the area, as identified in the strategy development process. This provides a framework for the implementation of the strategy by defining the broad actions that will support the achievement of local objectives. The action plan is also integrated with the LEADER monitoring framework in terms of indicators and outputs.

3.6.1 Local Objectives

The action plan outlines a set of clearly defined local objectives that respond to the needs of the area. Each of the local objectives will align with one LEADER sub theme. The LDS is not required to address all of the LEADER themes and sub-themes. The local objective provides an overarching statement (in one sentence) outlining how key priorities emerging from the area profile, needs analysis and prioritisation exercise will be addressed.

No more than 15 local objectives should be developed and included in the LDS. Within this limit, LAGs should develop the most appropriate number of local objectives that will support the delivery of their LDS. LAGs should also be cognisant of the available human and financial resources as well as practical management implications when selecting local objectives. LAGs may therefore wish to limit the number of objectives to ensure that all of the objectives contained in the LDS can be implemented in full. In setting local objectives, LAGs must address the following:

- Each objective must align to one selected LEADER sub theme.
- Complement the objectives of the LECP/draft LECP.
- Coherence and consistency between LDSs and local, national, and EU strategies, including local sectoral ones
- Will demonstrate a targeted approach to communities of interest/ community needs identified as part of consultation
- Will demonstrate consideration of climate change mitigation
- The objectives must be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time Bound).

For each objective a brief summary is required that sets out a rationale as to why a particular approach is proposed. The rationale should explicitly reference the needs and/or development potential identified, with reference to the findings from the area profile and participative planning work.

3.6.2 Financial Allocation

LAGs are required to estimate a budget amount for each objective. This helps to determine the scale of the objective and whether it can be achieved with the resources allocated. It is recognised that estimated costs may change over time. While the ongoing financial monitoring will not require the LAG to strictly adhere to these figures, the estimate should be as accurate as possible, as consistent and significant deviation from the estimated allocation may indicate issues with the accuracy of the financial plan submitted.

3.6.3 Strategic Actions

A strategic action is a high-level activity that is critical to achieving the local objective. It is likely that each local objective will encompass a number of strategic actions. It is important to ensure that the strategic actions that form the basis of the LDS demonstrate complementarity and a clear demarcation with other EU/national funding programmes/interventions. The following information must be provided for each strategic action:

Title of strategic action: the title should outline in one sentence the specific focus of the strategic action.

Brief description of the strategic action: this provides an overview of the activity at a macro level. A detailed description outlining the specific tasks involved in implementing the action should not be provided. Where the strategic action involves a call for proposals, it is important to specify whether the call is 'time-limited' or 'ongoing'.

Primary target group: LAGs are required to identify the particular target group that will benefit from the action e.g. young farmers, entrepreneurs, start-ups, established business owners, the local community in a geographical area, the unemployed, NEETs (Young People who are Not in Employment, Education or Training).

Geographic area: this details the geographic area that the strategic action will be focused on. A strategic action may cover the entire LDS boundary or target a particular geographic area(s) e.g. name of village, town or part of county within the LDS boundary.

Organisation responsible for delivering strategic action: the LAG is required to identify the name of the organisation (LAG member/Implementing Partner) that has overall responsibility for the implementation of the particular strategic action.

Collaborating organisations: this identifies the names of any other organisations (not represented on the LAG), who will collaborate in the delivery of a strategic action.

Timeframe for delivery of action: this outlines the estimated timeframe (start-date to end date) for delivery of the strategic action, in the format of quarter/year i.e. Q1/2024 – Q3/2025.

Anticipated outputs / Indicators & targets: this requires the LAG to select the most appropriate indicator(s) for each strategic action, which will be used to track progress in achieving the local objective.

LDS Action Plan – Minimum Requirements to be included in the LDS	
Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An action plan template (template provided in Appendix 1 of this document) must be completed for each local objective and strategic action.• In completing the action plan template LAGs should ensure that they are considering and responding to the Appraisal Criteria and Core Competencies set out in Section 5 of this document.

3.7 LDS Financial Plan

Each LAG is required to develop a financial plan that provides a forecast of expenditure for the implementation of the LDS for 2023-2029 to ensure that sufficient budget is provided for the closure of the programme in the years 2028 and 2029. As part of the Stage 1 Expression of Interest process, the Department published the maximum budget available for each sub-regional area under the 2023-2027 LEADER programme. This list is included as Appendix 5. Groups that indicated at Stage 1 that their LDS will not be covering the full sub-regional area will be advised separately by DRCD of the available budget in their defined area. The financial plan must demonstrate value for money and be directly linked to the LDS action plan detailing:

- i. Animation and LAG Administration costs.
- ii. Implementation of the Action Plan.

Please note that the costs associated with the administrative validation checks on project applications and payment claims (previously referred to as article 48 checks) will be funded outside of the 25% administration budget and as such it is not necessary to make provision for these costs when preparing the financial plan. Following the conclusion of Stage 2, DRCD will engage with LAGs selected to outline the specific arrangements in this regard.

It should also be noted that the financial plan should exclude any costs related to concluding the previous LEADER programmes. This will be managed via a separate process by the Department.

A reasonableness of cost check will be completed as part of the appraisal on all salary costs applied to the 2023-2027 LEADER programme. Further information on this process is available in Section 5. LDS Appraisal and Selection Process. For any LEADER roles included in the staffing section of the financial plan template, applicant LAGs will be required to specify the following, along with additional information as contained in the comments section of the template:

- a) Job description
- b) Number of years' experience of staff member.
- c) Proposed salary scale (as provided by the candidate LAG); and,
- d) Starting point on the salary scale (as provided by the candidate LAG).

Non-salary costs will **not** be subject to a reasonableness of cost assessment as part of the LDS appraisal process.

The regulatory framework stipulates that the total administration and animation costs must not exceed 25% of the total budget allocation. In line with the EU Regulations LAGs must ensure that administration and animation costs do not breach the maximum ceiling of 25%.

LDS proposals should therefore be realistic and proportionate to the LEADER allocation and the local ability to match fund. The LAG selection is based on the quality of the LDS, as such, a realistic and robust budget projection is essential.

A profile of expected expenditure, allocated by year over the programme period up to 2029, should be prepared. This should be done on the basis of a best estimate of LAG and project development activity, together with LAG staffing, administration and running costs. Best practice would suggest that groups should prepare a draft operational budget for the programming period as the basis for estimating LAG staffing, animation, administration and running costs. This specific profile is likely to

see higher costs in the early years and must be managed so that this is no greater than 25% of the expenditure incurred under the LDS by the end of the programming period.

The most important task of the LAG is animation and capacity building. Sufficient resources must be assigned by the LAGs to this task and should be reflected in the LDS budgeting. As the programme funding is finite and for the duration of the programme, the financial plan must demonstrate that the staffing complement, i.e. project development officers, administrative and financial personnel can and will execute the local objectives identified in the LDS.

The LDS implementation arrangements should then clearly set out the main financial management responsibilities, and lines of accountability.

LAGs must submit the financial plan, on the template provided in Appendix 2 of this document, for the period 2023-2029 to take account of the period required for the closure of the programme. The total budget cost should not exceed the maximum budget allocated by the Department for the sub-regional area/defined area covered by LAG. In cases where an LDS is being submitted for only part of a sub-regional area, the budget should be adjusted pro-rata in order to take account of the actual area concerned. Where applicable, LAGs must also provide a specific budget line for actions supporting island communities.

The template also records other budgetary-related information, including monitoring and evaluation under LEADER. Two separate amounts for the interim evaluation and final/ex post evaluations should be stipulated here. These evaluations are mandatory as part of the CSP Regulation.

In respect of each premises where the programme will operate from, the template provided in Appendix 2 must be completed also. The estimates to be given for rent etc. must reconcile with the overall amount provided in Appendix 2.

A financial plan that is submitted on the incorrect template will not be accepted. An electronic version of the template and guidance can be downloaded from the DRCD and Pobal websites.

A brief summary of the eligible LEADER costs is outlined below:

Animation Costs: the animation costs relate to promoting the LDS in the sub-regional area and capacity building with the wider community and prospective promoters. LAGs should actively target particular communities and groups who experience disadvantage or who have not previously benefited from LEADER funding. Examples of eligible expenditure include information provision and campaigns, facilitating community exchange between stakeholders, training and technical support to potential promoters to develop a project.

Administration/running costs: administration costs include the operational costs of the LAG that are associated with the implementation of the strategy. Examples of eligible expenditure include operating/running costs, staff salary costs, staff training, publicity and communications, financial management/audit and monitoring and evaluation of the LDS.

Implementation of operations/projects under the LDS: examples of eligible costs for local projects includes construction, acquisition or improvement of immovable property; purchase of new machinery and equipment; general costs linked to the project such as architect, engineer and consultation fees; the acquisition of patents or licenses, training and feasibility studies. Full details on eligible and ineligible activity will be provided in the LEADER Operating Rules when developed.

LDS financial plan – minimum requirements to be included in the LDS	
Financial Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A completed financial plan template (Appendix 2 of this document). The financial plan can be included as an appendix.

3.8 Duration of the Agreement

Each LAG is required to submit an LDS to cover the period 2023-2027 with the Financial Plan covering the period 2023-2029. The duration of the agreement between the Department and the LAG will commence at the contract issue date, up until 31st December 2029 to take account of the period required for the closure of the programme. The implementation of the LDS, including expenditure, can only commence once a signed agreement is in place.

LDS Annual Planning / Reporting Requirements

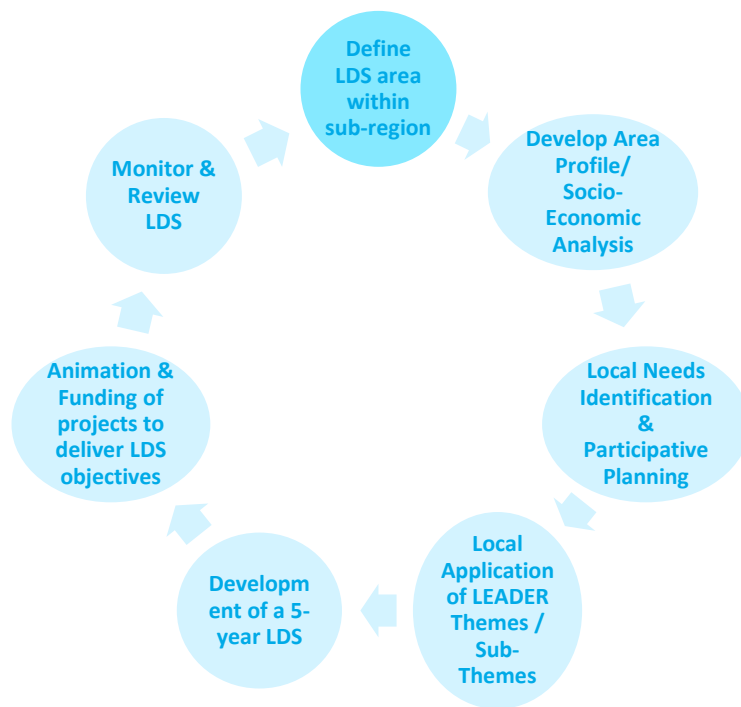
The LDS is essentially a strategic plan that covers the period 2023-2027. Following the approval of the strategy, each LAG will develop and submit an Annual Implementation Plan that provides a high level overview of how the LAG will deliver against each of the agreed objectives and strategic actions for that particular year. The plan will provide additional detail on how the strategic actions will be delivered in terms of the type of indicative activities that will be undertaken. The implementation plan will be completed on an annual basis.

The performance of each LAG will be monitored over the term of the agreement by the Department and/or its agent's through an annual End of Year review. This will provide a summary of the LAG's progress in achieving the objectives and actions set out in the Annual Implementation Plan. It is also intended that a mid-term review of LEADER and the CSP will be undertaken and LAGs will be required to contribute to this process.

To facilitate the annual planning and reporting process, each LAG will input key aspects of the LDS on to the LEADER ICT system.

The programme life-cycle relating to the LDS can be illustrated through the diagram in Figure 1.

Figure 1: LDS Programme Life-Cycle



Section 4: Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (PMEF)

Local Action Groups will be required to monitor progress on the delivery of their approved LDS and to provide an evaluation on the impact of the support provided throughout the programming period.

This will be done by through the submission of an Annual Progress Report (APR) and Implementation Plan from 2024 onwards. The APR will cover the LAG's key activities, achievements and challenges during the previous calendar year or part thereof. It will also provide the LAG with the opportunity to outline in an Implementation Plan their planned actions and activities for the coming calendar year.

4.1 Regulatory Overview

The following rules govern the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework PMEF for:

- setting up the performance monitoring and evaluation framework - Regulation 2021/2115.
- the calculation of output and result indicators - Regulation 2021/2290, and;
- evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plans and the provision of information for monitoring and evaluation - Regulation 2022/1475.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plan (SP) Regulation – 2021/2115.

The CSP Regulation establishes rules on support for CAP submitted by Member States. Article 128 establishes the performance monitoring and evaluation framework (PMEF), which applies to the CAP from 2023 until 2027. The PMEF supports the shift in policy focus from compliance with rules to performance and results.

This set of common performance indicators (as contained in Annex I – CSP Regulation.) includes:

- output indicators, which will be used for monitoring the implementation of the CAP;
- result indicators, which will be used to monitor EU countries' progress towards pre-set targets.

The output indicator that relates to the LEADER programme is the number of local development strategies selected to deliver the programme. This information will be provided to the EU Commission once Stage 2 of the selection process has concluded.

A full list of result indicators that is applicable to the LEADER 2023-2027 programme is contained in Appendix 3. Official guidance on how to report the result indicators for LEADER will form part of the new programme Operating Rules.

Some of the data to be collected on LAGs and their activities for LEADER represent the underlying data necessary for the calculation of the output and result indicators presented in the APR. In addition, they also seek to better demonstrate the **added value** of the LEADER intervention as the basis for evaluation.

4.2 Added Value of LEADER

There is a strong need to demonstrate the added value of LEADER compared to supports provided through other funding streams. The added value of LEADER is derived from the full application of the 7 LEADER principles as outlined in Section 1.1 above. The actions outlined in the LDS must clearly demonstrate the added value of the LEADER approach to rural development.

The added value of LEADER can be expressed as;

- improved social capital
- improved governance
- enhanced results and impacts of programme/strategy implementation

The assessment of the added value of LEADER refers to the benefits that are obtained as a result of the proper application of the LEADER method, compared to those benefits which would not have been obtained without applying this method. The [Guidelines for the Evaluation of LEADER](#) provide recommendations for LAGs on how to conduct evaluation activities, including added value, at the local level.

In line with the guidance, the added value of LEADER must be incorporated and reported on in all LAG evaluations undertaken.

Calculation of output and result indicators Implementing - Regulation 2021/2290

Full details in relation to the output and result indicators that are required to be reported on are set out in the EU Implementing Regulations 2021/2290⁴.

In terms of LEADER, the key output indicator is the share of the rural population covered by local development strategies. This data will be collated by DRCD following the conclusion of the selection process.

Provision of Information for Monitoring and Evaluation - Regulation 2022/1475

Data provided in the APR alone does not provide the necessary detailed information to carry out the proper monitoring and evaluation of the LEADER achievements.

Once a LAG has been selected, it shall report to DRCD the **“Data related to LAGs”** specified in Annex VII of Regulation 2022/1475. This means that specific information relating to LAGs selected by 31st December 2023 will have to be reported by DRCD to the Commission by 30th April 2024.

In terms of reporting on the *“number of young persons in LAG’s decision-making body”* - Data Related to LAGs. The reference date for calculating the age is the last day of the call for LAGs selection. In order to show consistency through Ireland’s CAP, the age upper limit shall not exceed 40 as stipulated in Article 4(6) of the CAP Regulation.

The **“Data related to LAGs activities”** will be reported on by LAGs in 2026 and 2030.

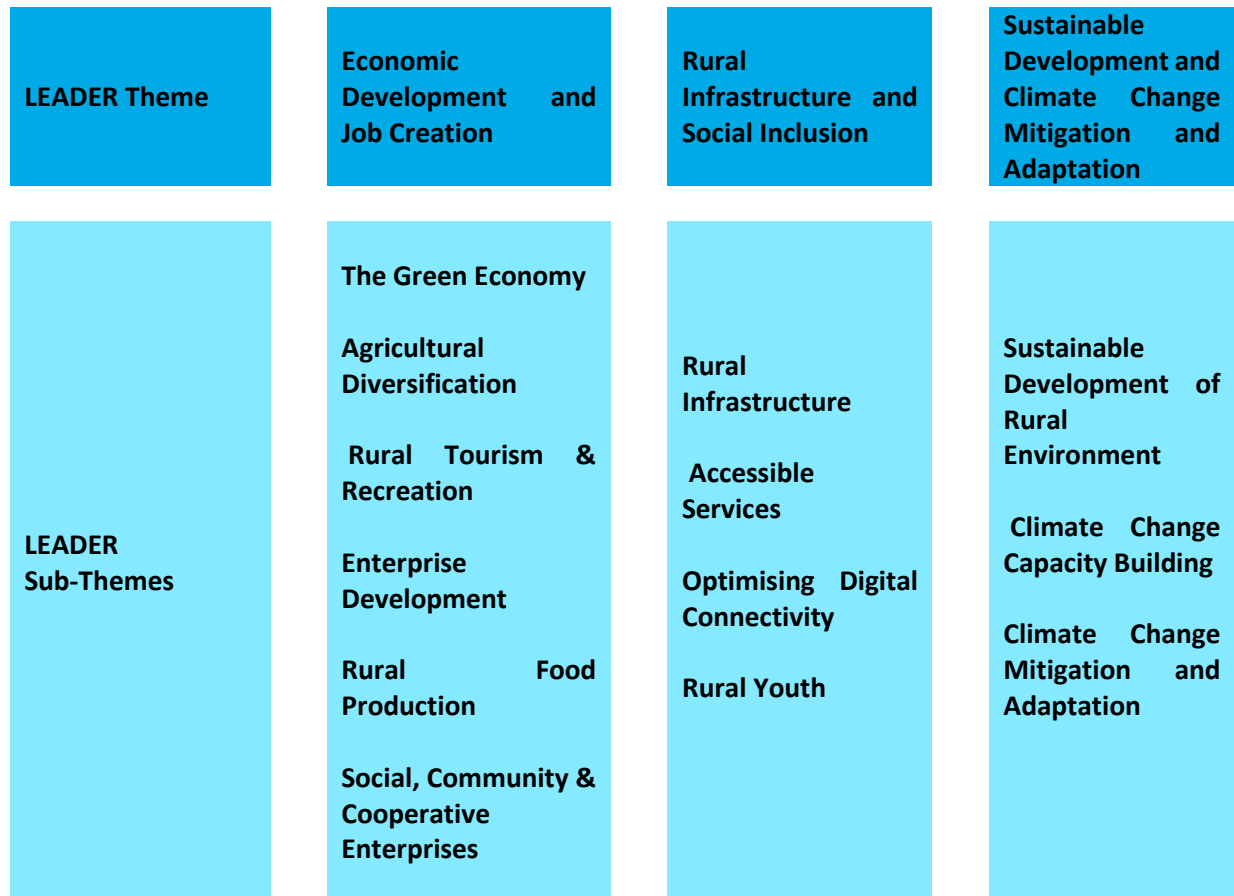
4.3 Monitoring Framework

The monitoring framework for the LEADER programme is underpinned by the high level diagram as outlined in Figure 2. The LDS, as it is developed, will be centred on the LEADER themes (each of which has a number of sub-themes). It is not mandatory to include actions under all theme or sub-theme but the exclusion of themes/sub-themes should be on the basis of evidence from the LDS consultation process and this evidence should be outlined in the LDS. The Annual Implementation Plan, in turn, will

⁴ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/2290 of 21 December 2021

set out the practical actions/activities that will be undertaken, again relating back to the overarching themes/sub-themes.

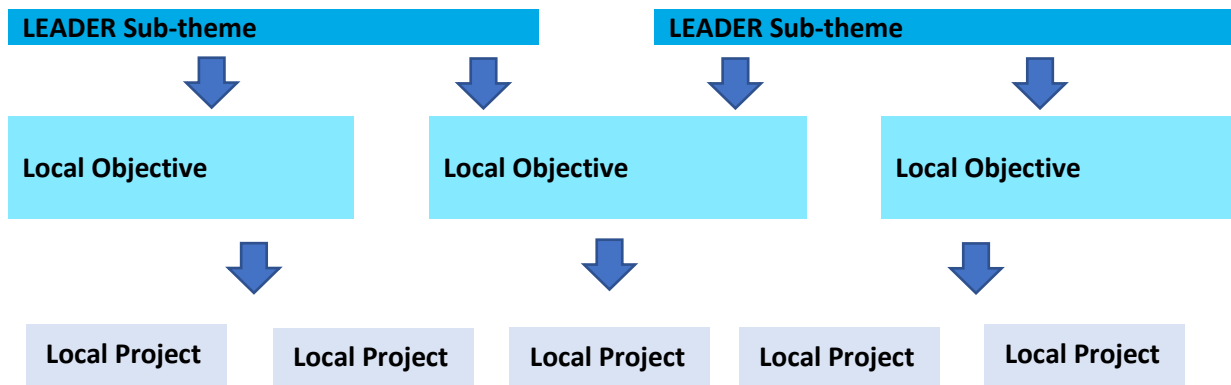
Figure 2: LEADER High Level Relationship Diagram



In terms of the monitoring of the LDS, each strategy will contain a series of local objectives, as identified by the LAG. Each local objective will be linked to one of the overall LEADER sub-themes. Local projects will be linked in turn to one of the LDSs local objectives. This process is illustrated by the diagram outlined in Figure 4.

All projects relating to a particular sub-theme will have common indicators against which information will be captured. The structure will facilitate robust tracking and monitoring of the programme, as each LEADER sub-theme will have specific relevant indicators. These linkages clearly locate each local project within the context of the overall programme and allow for a “rolling up” of information to theme and programme level, as required.

Figure 3: Leader Project Framework



As with previous iterations of LEADER, programme monitoring will be carried out at two levels:

- i. Project Level Monitoring
- ii. Monitoring of LAGs

4.4 Project Level Monitoring

Reporting on the progress/outputs of the LEADER programme will be facilitated by a defined set of information that will be captured on every funded project, allowing ready access to information with which to provide analysis and respond to queries. Information at project level will be captured at the following junctures:

➤ **Application Stage**

Most of the basic project information will be captured on the LEADER ICT system at the point of application - type of funding applied for, the specific sector, is it a new/existing enterprise, how many (if any) are currently employed etc.

➤ **Reporting on Outputs/Outcomes**

At a later juncture, each project will be required to provide information on what has been delivered with the support of the funding. Some of this information will be generic (irrespective of project type), such as jobs created. Other information will be specific to the project.

The reporting will also contain a qualitative element, in which projects will briefly describe the progress/achievements and highlight any key learning. It will be the responsibility of the LAG to ensure that the funded projects comply with the LEADER reporting requirements and that the data is quality checked.

The Department and/or its agent's will collate the data reported by funded projects and provide analysis on the progress and outputs/outcomes achieved with the LEADER funding.

The timing of the project reporting (on outputs) will depend on the type of project involved. In most cases, reporting will take place at the final payment stage.

In addition to the information captured about/from individual projects, there will be a requirement, on an annual basis, for each LAG to reflect on the objectives set in their LDS and to determine achievement against them to date.

Each LAG will reflect on the animation strategies they have applied in relation to each objective, how each objective is meeting its stated outcomes, and contributing to the programme themes and sub themes. It will reflect on how selected projects are meeting objectives as well as the intended focus for the coming year.

➤ **Detailed Project / Case Studies**

As part of this exercise, each LAG will prepare a Case Study relevant to one of the projects selected. Case Studies may cover some or all of the following:

- Case study context
- Objective that it relates to as well as its alignment to the themes and subthemes
- LEADER Principles in action (i.e. networking, partnerships & collaborations in place)
- Promoter background/description
- Project/Business description
- Products/Facilities/Services
- Financial Information (previous funding / other sources of funding)
- Employment (current and potential)
- Benefit to the community

4.5 Monitoring of LAGs

In addition to overseeing the monitoring of the funded projects, the LAG itself will also be required to submit an Annual Performance Report (APR) to the Department and/or its agents. The specific reporting timelines for LEADER will be outlined in the Operating Rules. The APR will incorporate reporting of:

- Information on the organisational structure, operations and decision-making within the LAG
- Progress made during the year against local objectives set out in the Annual Implementation Plan.
- Any issues/challenges encountered in implementation during the year
- Any particular successes to be highlighted
- Priorities for the coming year

The Department and/or its agents will review the APR. The Department and/or its agents will also summarise any patterns, trends or key issues emerging from the APR. The Department and/or its agents will make data from the Annual Performance Reports available to contribute to an overall framework for evaluating the LEADER programme as a whole and, more specifically, the performance of the LAGs within that.

All LAGs should note that as part of the overall programme monitoring framework there will be an ongoing requirement to support the assessment of compliance through both the control framework and ongoing audit and review. Full details of the types of controls that will support the implementation of LEADER will be available in the Operating Rules.

4.6 Management, monitoring and evaluation arrangements

Overview

The Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) requires that the LDS shall contain details setting out the arrangements, mechanisms and procedures through which it will be implemented by the LAG. These implementation provisions should include the management and monitoring arrangements of the strategy, the implementation capacity of the LAG and the specific arrangements for evaluation (Article 32(e)).

Monitoring and Review

The monitoring framework as outlined above will be reported on in the APR. The Department and/or its agents will collate the information provided in the annual performance reviews and report on this information.

LAGs will be required to update the indicator information, in terms of real figures, at project-end i.e. the date of final payment⁵. As part of the monitoring and evaluation plan, the LAG should outline the methodology for data collection from local projects to track each indicator and the frequency of collection. In addition, the plan must establish who has responsibility for ensuring that the data is collected and securely maintained for future analysis.

Monitoring is also important in the context of reviewing how the strategy is operating. It is important for the LAG to review the LDS and annual implementation plan, in order to measure progress in meeting local objectives and strategic actions whilst also identifying any challenges. For example, following a review it may be necessary to adjust the strategy due to unanticipated events and agree new action steps. A review of the strategy should be undertaken by the LAG, for the duration of the plan and at regular defined intervals.

Evaluation

Each LAG is required to outline how it proposes to evaluate the strategy. The evaluation plan should encompass responses to the following questions:

- What are the LAG's objectives for the evaluation of the LDS?
- The assessment of the added value of LEADER.
- What are the governance and co-ordination arrangements for managing the process?
- Are there any specific LDS or LEADER topics or themes the LAG will wish to evaluate?
- What are the data requirements for evaluating the LDS? (The LAG will be required to develop its own means of capturing the additional information required for its evaluation, as appropriate to the approach adopted locally)
- What are the tools and methods to be employed? This can include self-evaluation through the use of qualitative tools (surveys, focus groups), the development of additional indicators, case-studies highlighting innovation, participation in local research, etc. The LAG may choose to engage an external evaluation to lend greater objectivity to the process. Public procurement rules should be adhered to if engaging an external evaluator. The approach to evaluation should capture and enable greater consideration of the more qualitative aspects of LEADER delivery as well as the quantitative aspects.
- What are the timelines for the evaluation and any relevant milestones?

⁵ There are some exceptions in which projects will be required to report at 12 month's post-final payment.

- What is the proposed approach to communicating evaluation activities/findings?
- What are the resources required?

In addition, the LAG will be required to contribute to any national programme-level evaluation of LEADER and/or Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan, which is undertaken by Government or the EU.

4.7 GDPR Requirements

The selected LAG and all associated partners are subject to the data protection and privacy laws of Ireland and the EU, in particular the Data Protection Act 2018 and Regulation (EU) 2016/679, known as the EU General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"). Information provided to the LAG by an Implementing Partner, or a promoter, may include personal data and sensitive personal data as defined by the Data Protection Acts 1988-2018.

It is the responsibility of the LAG to ensure that all partners are compliant with data protection legislation. LAGs are required to include a copy of their GDPR policy when submitting the key information required under LAG overview and governance model in Section 3.

Data controllers are the legal entities responsible for the acquisition, processing and use of personal data. The Department of Rural and Community Development, as the Programme Manager for LEADER, is the data controller and the owner of any information it directs to be collected including that required to be collected by the EU regulations, with regard to the LEADER programme.

LAGs (this includes Financial Partners, Implementing Partners and Animating Partners) are classified as data processors in the LEADER programme. Where applicable, the LAG must also ensure that its Implementing Partners, Animating Partners (if applicable) and Financial Partners are compliant with data protection legislation. Data collected by the LAG or its partners can only be used for the purpose for which it was collected in connection to the LEADER programme and must not be used for any other purpose. Where data is to be shared with an entity which is not a LAG or partner, permission from DRCD must be sought in advance.

The Department of Rural and Community Development is the owner of the LEADER ICT System to be used to administer the new LEADER programme, which is made available for use by the data processors, (the LAGs, Financial Partners and their associated Implementing Partners and animating partners).

In this regard, all requests for information/documentation, i.e. financial, salary, administrative etc. by DRCD from the LAGs or its implementing partners or animating partners (if applicable), must be provided within the indicated timeframe.

The LEADER LDS will be submitted via a secure portal on the Pobal network, Pobal is a data processor. Pobal's external third party software provider is a data processor also but in the context of system development and support only. Pobal and the external IT provider have a responsibility to keep personal data secure from unauthorised access, disclosure, destruction or accidental loss.

The Data Controller (DRCD) and Pobal (Data Processor) have agreed that the type(s) of personal data that will be processed as part of the LDS selection process will include but is not limited to:

- Details of the LAG & Promoter
- Job Descriptions, Person specifications and salary expenditure of staff members in the LAGs, Implementing Partners and Animating Partners who are funded under the LDS submitted.

Under GDPR and for the purposes of the new LEADER programme LAGs will be required to have policies and procedures in place in relation to the processing of personal data setting out clearly:

- what the personal data collected will be used for
- how this personal data will be kept safe and secure
- the length of time this information will be retained i.e. 7 years after final use of the data

For further information on Data Protection, please contact the Office of the Data Commissioner and/or consult the Data Commissioner's website <https://www.dataprotection.ie>.

Section 5: LDS Appraisal and Selection Process

5.1 Overview

An Independent Selection Committee will be established by DRCD as part of the LDS appraisal and selection process. DRCD has designated responsibility to Pobal to provide technical and administrative support to the Independent Selection Committee, appraising the LDSs and to make recommendations to the Committee. It should be noted that given the defined LEADER budget, it may not be possible to fund all LDSs submitted.

In sub-regional areas where more than one strategy covering the full sub-regional area is submitted only one will be selected to deliver the programme. In areas where more than one strategy is submitted covering all or part of a sub-regional area, the Independent Selection Committee may select one or more strategies to deliver the programme. The final decisions regarding the selection and funding of strategies will rest with the Independent Selection Committee. An appeals process will be in place.

The aim of the stage 2 appraisal and selection process is to ensure that the LDS selected is inclusive, participative, addresses locally identified needs and can demonstrate clear strategic integration at local, national and international level with core policies and priorities for sustainable rural development.

The appraisal of the LDS will be required to ensure that each applicant LAG has the capacity to deliver the proposed local objectives and strategic actions and has considered the practical implications of this over the programme period. DRCD, in co-operation with the Independent Selection Committee and Pobal, will provide the support necessary to assist all groups eligible to take part in Stage 2 of the LAG selection process. This is to ensure that rural communities have access to LEADER funding through a strong, fully supported LDS, which is tailored to address the specific needs of the area concerned.

Ultimately, the LDS selected by the Independent Selection Committee will determine the LAG or LAGs that will deliver the LEADER programme in a sub-regional area.

5.2 Stages of LDS Appraisal and Selection Process

The two stages of the appraisal and selection process are set out as follows:

- **Stage 1: Selection of Expression of Interest (EOI)**

In October 2022, DRCD sought an Expression of Interest (EOI) from any group who wished to be considered for the delivery of LEADER interventions for the 2023-2027 programme in their respective sub-regional area. The closing date for the submission of the completed EOI's was 16th December 2022. The EOI process was managed by DRCD.

- **Stage 2: Submission of LDS**

Applicant groups whose EOIs were approved under Stage 1 have been invited to develop a full LDS, which will be submitted to Pobal for appraisal before forwarding to the Independent Selection Committee for their adjudication. Completed LDSs must be submitted no later than Friday 14th July 2023. Applicant groups may submit their LDS earlier if it is available in order to facilitate the delivery of projects on the ground at the earliest stage possible. However, in areas

where more than one group was successful following Stage 1 of the selection process the LDSs will not be assessed until all strategies have been submitted.

The appraisal and scoring criterion are detailed on the following section along with the LDS submission process, including closing date for submission.

5.3 Appraisal Criteria

Pobal will provide technical and administrative support to the Independent Selection Committee in the context of appraisal of the LDS using the following appraisal criteria.

LDS Appraisal Criteria

Governance	
Core Competencies	Each LAG must demonstrate:
Sector Representation	1. The structure of the LAG is balanced i.e. representatives of public and private local socioeconomic interests, in which no single interest group controls the decision-making. Structure reflects representation and /or participation of youth organisations, marginalised and disadvantaged groups.
Gender Balance Management Capacity and Experience	2. There is appropriate gender balance on all structures. 3. The LAG demonstrates they have experience of managing public funding and project delivery and demonstrates they have the necessary governance and financial management systems, controls and processes in place to manage the delivery of the strategy including having personnel with the necessary skills to animate and build capacity on Environment and Climate change requirements;
Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity	4. The LAG has systems and processes in place to monitor and evaluate progress.
Risk Management	5. The LAG has identified how risks in relation to the delivery of the strategy will be identified, mitigated against and managed.
Financial Capacity	6. The LAG has identified a lead organisation/ Implementing Partner with roles and responsibilities clearly identified (where applicable). 7. The LAG has demonstrated that an accountable and transparent decision-making process will be in place in relation to the selection of projects.
	8. The LAG has demonstrated that it will be able to operate within its Administration and Animation budget over the period 2023 to 2029.
Local Need	
Core Competencies	Each LAG must: 1. Provide a clear definition and description of the area and its population, including:

Needs Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The development needs and potential of the area - Analysis of social and economic disadvantage, including identifying any priority target groups, communities and or specific geographical areas
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify geographic areas/ target groups that have not been supported by or have had low support from the LEADER programme to-date.
CLLD/ Participative Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Provide evidence that local community, including island communities where relevant, and key stakeholders were consulted and involved in the identification of needs and development of the strategy / action plan. 3. Demonstrate that relevant and up-to-date evidence-based research, data and information, including the outcomes of local consultations informed the Action Plan; i.e. demonstrate how the needs identified are being addressed in the Action Plan. 4. Demonstrate that young people and disadvantaged or marginalised groups in the community were specifically engaged with as part of the consultation process and that their needs are addressed in the Action Plan
Evidence-based planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Identify the priorities, local objectives, strategic actions to meet the needs identified and provide a clear rationale for their selection. 6. Demonstrate how the LDS will engage with target groups and geographic areas where there has been little to no LEADER impact to-date and how they will animate and build capacity of these communities. 7. Provide justification in cases where any of the indicative themes or sub-themes will not be supported through the LDS e.g. the needs assessment undertaken indicated that in the area there was no requirement for tourism related initiatives to be supported.

Sustainability	
Core Competencies	Each LAG must:
Economic Sustainability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate how the strategy, priorities and actions will create quality employment opportunities.
Social Sustainability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Describe how the LDS promotes opportunities for public participation and meaningful ongoing engagement processes, which are inclusive and accessible.
Environmental Sustainability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Demonstrate how the priorities and actions address climate change mitigation and adaptation

Strategic Fit	
<p>Core Competencies</p> <p>Strategic Fit with LEADER Priorities</p> <p>Strategic Fit with Key National/ International Policies</p> <p>Strategic Fit with Local Strategies</p> <p>Innovation</p>	<p>Each LAG must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate that the priorities, objectives and actions are congruent with LEADER programme priorities and particularly the programme themes and subthemes. 2. Highlight complementarity with relevant regional, national and EU policies and strategies as set out in section 2.4 of this guidance. 3. Identify how the LDS complements other interventions in the area, particularly other local development strategies and plans e.g. LECPs/draft LECPs 4. Demonstrate coordination / linkages with other agencies and/or structures, other local development strategies and plans to ensure that there is synergy and added value 5. Demonstrate innovation in terms of new and innovative solutions to local issues, and delivery approaches 6. In line with national policy, the LAG selected to deliver an LDS in an area that includes off-shore islands must include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. representation from the island community in the decision making process b. specific actions developed in consultation with the island community c. Ring-fenced budget to implement these actions.

Value for Money	
<p>Core Competencies</p> <p>Economy</p> <p>Efficiency</p> <p>Effectiveness</p> <p>Equity</p>	<p>Each LAG must demonstrate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Economy - that the budget and related costs are reasonable and commensurate with the quality and nature of the activities proposed, and that the budget meets all programme requirements. A Reasonableness of Cost (RoC) check on salaries only will be completed by Pobal as per agreed procedures by DRCD. 2. Efficiency - Action Plan is coherent, logical, time-framed and realistic with clear outputs. Targets are in line with LEADER programme Indicators. 3. Effectiveness - do the described outputs effectively contribute to the desired outcome? The LDS must have a clear linkage between vision and achievable local objectives that clearly address the needs identified. The LDS clearly demonstrates their approach to building capacity at a local level. 4. Equity - demonstrate that the strategy identifies with social, economic and environmental inequalities (as part of the needs analysis / socio economic profile), and the Action Plan contains actions to address these.

5.4 Scoring Criterion

To be considered to have met the minimum standard required, the LDS must achieve **an overall score of at least 60 out of 100 to be recommended for approval**. Each criterion is weighted equally with a maximum score of 20 available per criterion and applicants **must achieve a minimum score of 12 for each criterion** (See Table below). Clarifications may be sought from applicant LAGs during the appraisal process. In areas where more than one strategy is submitted covering the full sub-regional area only one strategy will be chosen. In these circumstances, the highest scoring LDS as determined by the Independent Selection Committee will be chosen. In areas where more than one strategy is submitted covering all or part of a sub-regional area, the Independent Selection Committee may select one or more strategies to deliver the programme.

Scoring Criterion	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Score
Governance	12	20	
Local Need	12	20	
Sustainability	12	20	
Strategic Fit	12	20	
Value for Money	12	20	
Total Score	60	100	

5.5 Submission of the LDS

The LDS will be appraised by Pobal and will be submitted to the Independent Selection Committee for their adjudication.

The closing date for submission of LDS's under Stage 2 is **Friday 14th July 2023**. Applicant groups may submit their LDS earlier if it is available in order to facilitate the delivery of projects on the ground at the earliest stage possible. However, in areas where more than one group was successful following Stage 1 of the selection process the LDSs will not be assessed until all strategies have been submitted.

The LDS (including all appendices) must be submitted to Pobal in electronic format via a secure portal. Details will be provided of arrangement for this in due course.

Late submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances.

An appeals process will be put in place.

Section 6: Additional Supports for LDS Development

LAGs will have a maximum of 6 months to develop and submit their LDS under Stage 2 of the selection process. During this period, entities may wish to avail of the following practical supports:

6.1 National Information Event

A National Information Event will be held which will outline the process for the development of an LDS and discuss the priorities of 2023-2027 LEADER programme and how these priorities need to be incorporated into the development and implementation of the LDS. The event will also provide an opportunity for LAGs to seek clarifications on the required content of the LDS, the appraisal and selection process, monitoring and reporting requirements and any other aspects of the programme. Details of this event will be provided in the coming weeks.

6.2 Thematic Support Events

Pobal, in conjunction with DRCD will host a series of capacity building events for entities that are developing an LDS. These events will be designed to provide practical guidance and support to the development of an LDS. They will include a focus on the themes and subthemes of the 2023-2027 LEADER programme, the wider rural development and sustainable development policy context with a view to providing expert inputs and practical guidance on how these thematic areas can be incorporated into an LDS. Dates and details of these capacity building events will be provided in the coming weeks.

6.3 Feedback on Draft LDS

As part of the technical support that Pobal will provide and assist in the development of a high quality LDS, applicant LAGs will have an opportunity to submit a draft LDS. All applicant LAGs are being given the opportunity to submit a Draft LDS to Pobal. These may be submitted during the period 17th April – 28th April, 2023. Pobal will review 3 areas of the LDS (Section 3.3 LDS Area Profile, Section 3.4 CLLD and Participative Planning, Section 3.6 LDS Action Plan) and focus on the weaknesses only.

Whilst it is not mandatory to submit a draft of the LDS, applicant LAGs are strongly encouraged to avail of this opportunity. Specific feedback will be given to the applicant LAG on their draft. In addition, in order to ensure fairness to all applicant LAGs the feedback will also be collated as anonymised observations and recommendations and published for the benefit of all applicants. Final LDSs to be submitted by the closing date of Friday, 14th July, 2023, via a secure upload facility, details of which will be provided by Pobal in due course.

6.4 LDS Queries

Pobal will operate a dedicated email address for queries relating to the LDS selection process. Queries will be managed and answered centrally by Pobal, in consultation with DRCD, and will be responded to within 5 working days. An FAQ document will be developed, which will be regularly updated and available on the DRCD and Pobal websites, with details of frequently asked questions. Email address for LDS Queries: leader@pobal.ie

6.5 Useful Resources

Applicant LAG's may find the following sources of information useful in the development of the LDS.

Policy Context

- [Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goals Data Hub](#)
- [Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2023](#)
- [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#)
- [Smart Villages](#)
- [EU Long-term Vision for Rural Areas](#)
- [LECP Guidelines](#)

CLLD and Participative Planning

- [LEADER/CLLD Explained](#)
- [Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership with the Community and Voluntary Sector](#)
- [Resource Guide on Inclusive Community Engagement in Planning and Decision Making.](#)
- [European Evaluation Helpdesk – Guidelines, Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD \(Added Value of LEADER\)](#)

Rural Development Networks

- [European Network for Rural Development](#)
- [National Rural Network](#)

Section 7: Provisional Timeframes

Outlined below is a provisional timeframe for the LDS selection process, it should be noted that this timeframe may be subject to change.

LDS Stage	Timeframe
Launch of Stage 2 – Invitation to Submit an LDS	26th January, 2023
National Information Event	Week commencing 27th March, 2023 (TBC)
Thematic Support Events	Dates TBC
Closing Date for Submission of Draft LDS	17th – 28th April, 2023
Closing Date for Submission of Final LDS	14 th July, 2023
Contracts signed with LAGs	First contract to be signed by end August, 2023
Implementation of the LDS	Once Funding Agreement in place

Appendix 1 - LDS Action Plan Template

Applicants should pay particular attention to Section 3 of these guidelines when completing the Action Plan template. This Action Plan template must be completed for each local objective included in the LDS. Each local objective should be numbered consecutively. For sub-regional areas that contain island communities, indicative budgets for the implementation of actions specific to the islands must be included in their LEADER strategy. Strategic Actions should also be numbered consecutively and should be copied and repeated as necessary for the number of strategic actions contained under each local objective.

Local Objective 1	
Title of Local Objective	
Financial Allocation (€)	
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	

Strategic Action 1.1	
Title of Strategic Action	
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	
Geographic Area	
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	
Collaborating Organisations	

Timeframe for Delivery	
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	

Appendix 2 - LDS Financial Plan Template

Appendix 2 - Financial Plan

Guidance Notes

- 1 There are Four primary sheets and two secondary sheets in the Financial Plan Template:
 - (1) CLLD Strategy: these costs relate to the implementation of the local development strategy i.e. funding approved to beneficiaries for project activity in the period 2023-2027. This template must be consistent with the information provided in the LDS Action Plan.
 - (2) Administration and Animation Costs: this template includes costs relating to animation of the LDS in the sub-regional area through promotion, stakeholder engagement and capacity building activities targeting project promoters and the wider community. It also includes all operational and management costs associated with implementing LEADER. The administration costs of the LAG should cover the period 2023 to 2029 in order to take account of the period required for the closure of the programme.
 - (2.1) Office Costs: this template includes detailed breakdown for Office Costs. The overall total on this tab must correspond with the total for Office Costs on the "2.Admin Animation Costs) tab.
 - (3) Staffing: this template provides a breakdown of the LAG's salary costs in relation to delivering the LDS.
 - (3.1) Reasonableness of salary cost analyses. Comparison of proposed salaries with Public Sector Grade Pay Scales for comparable roles.
 - (4) Summary: this sheet is automatically populated by information entered in the other templates.
- 2 **N.B. The total administration and animation costs must not exceed 25% of the total budget allocation.**
- 3 You are required to read the explanatory notes at the end of the sheet before completing the template.
- 4 Any cells that are white must be filled out. Shaded cells are automatically populated and are locked.
- 5 The template should not be altered in any way as this will render the template invalid.
- 6 All four sheets must be fully completed.

Appendix 3 – LEADER Monitoring Framework

Result Indicators (specific to LEADER)		
Code	Result indicator	Description
R.37	Growth and jobs in rural areas	New jobs supported in CAP projects
R.38	LEADER coverage	Share of rural population covered by local development strategies
R.39	Developing the rural economy	Number of rural businesses, including bio-economy businesses, developed with CAP support
R.40	Smart transition of the rural economy	Number of supported smart-village strategies
R.41	Connecting rural Europe	Share of rural population benefitting from improved access to services and infrastructure through CAP support
R.42	Promoting social inclusion	Number of persons covered by supported social inclusion projects

Appendix 4 - Declaration and Disclaimer

Please read carefully:

By submitting the Local Development Strategy (LDS), the applicant authorises the submission and declares that the information provided in relation to the organisation described in this LDS is true and complete to the best of its knowledge and belief.

The applicant acknowledges that any funds awarded must be used for the purpose stated and not used to replace existing funding. The applicant also understands that information supplied in, or accompanying this application may be made available on request under the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

The applicant accepts, as a condition of the award of a grant, that it involves no commitment to any other grants from the Department of Rural and Community Development or Pobal. The applicant is agreeable to ongoing programme monitoring by the Department of Rural and Community Development and/or its agents and to allowing access to premises and records, as necessary, for that purpose.

The applicant also accepts that Pobal may contact other public funding organisations or Government Departments to discuss this application and previous funding awarded, as part of the appraisal process.

Disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act

The Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal wish to remind applicants that the information contained in the LDS and supporting documentation may be released, on request, to third parties, in accordance with all obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

You are asked to consider if any of the information supplied in the LDS and supporting documentation, should not be disclosed because of sensitivity. If this is the case, you should, when submitting the LDS, identify same and specify the reasons for its sensitivity.

The Department of Rural and Community Development/ Pobal will consult with you about sensitive information before making a decision on the release of such information. The Department of Rural and Community Development /Pobal will release, on request, information to third parties, without further consultation with you, unless you identify the information as sensitive with supporting reasons.

Disclaimer

Please read carefully:

It will be a condition of any application for funding under the terms and conditions of the LEADER element of the 2023-2027 CAP Strategic Plan that the applicant has read, understood and accepted the following:

- The Department of Rural and Community Development /Pobal shall not be liable to the applicant or any other party in respect of any loss, damage or costs of any nature arising directly or indirectly from:
 - The Local Development Strategy or the subject matter of the Local Development Strategy
 - The rejection, for any reason, of any application

- The Department of Rural and Community Development, its servants or agents shall not at any time in any circumstances be held responsible or liable in relation to any matter whatsoever arising in connection with the development, planning, construction, operation, management and/or administration of individual projects.

By submitting this Local Development Strategy application, the applicant acknowledges that it has read, understood and accepted the above points. The Declaration and Disclaimer should be signed by the Chairperson of the applicant group.

Chairperson: _____

Date: _____

2023-2027 LEADER Funding Allocations by county

County	Allocation
Carlow	€4.9m
Cavan	€6.4m
Clare	€6.8m
Cork*	€16.8m
Donegal	€10.4m
Dublin Rural	€4.7m
Galway	€9.0m
Kerry	€8.2m
Kildare	€5.4m
Kilkenny	€6.1m
Laois	€5.7m
Leitrim	€6.3m
Limerick	€6.9m
Longford	€5.8m
Louth	€4.9m
Mayo	€8.8m
Meath	€5.6m
Monaghan	€5.9m
Offaly	€6.3m
Roscommon	€6.8m
Sligo	€6.1m
Tipperary	€7.8m
Waterford	€6.1m
Westmeath	€5.7m
Wexford	€7.3m
Wicklow	€5.3m
Total	€180m

*County Cork includes three sub-regional areas of North Cork, South Cork and West Cork, the allocation indicated will be distributed across the three sub-regional areas.