

A step by step guide to accessing **LEADER funding**

action plan **advice**
checklist **business plans**
mentoring **SKILLS**
training **networking**
grant aid

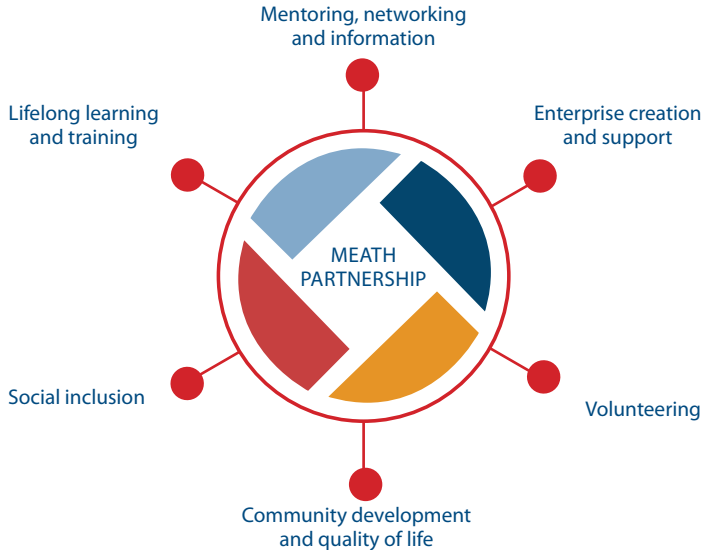


meath
partnership

engage • enable • participate • progress

Meath Partnership

Building Meath from the ground up - this is in essence, what we are all about. It is not just a tagline but a belief system that runs through every programme in our organisation.



Meath Partnership is a community organisation with charitable status. We work with a wide range of organisations, groups and individuals throughout the county to improve the quality of life and economic opportunities for all dwellers. We are responsible for the design and implementation of local, rural and community development programmes across Meath.

Meath Partnership has an important role in supporting the development of new and existing micro-enterprises and promoting workforce development in the county. This is achieved through a wide range of specialised training courses for small businesses, budding entrepreneurs, job seekers, early school leavers as well as many other groups. We also lead the advancement of the rural economy, the enhancement of the environment and the promotion of quality of life for the local communities across Co Meath.

Whether it's supporting small businesses or working with community groups we work to tackle social exclusion, we follow a bottom up approach and focus on responding to the needs of the community in Meath.

What's inside

- Introduction to the LEADER Programme
- LEADER funding and project ideas
- Who is eligible to apply and for what?
- The application process explained
- Additional supports
- Checklist



Introduction to the LEADER Programme

Rural communities, we believe, are the key to their own destinies. They are their own best assets and it is merely up to us to help bring out the “greatness within”. Our vision for County Meath through LEADER is to help grow and develop the rural communities economically, socially and culturally to make rural Meath an attractive place to live and to work. The LEADER Programme provides a unique opportunity to refocus support on growth, jobs and sustainability whilst ensuring the quality of life of all rural dwellers is improved.

With the financial resources coupled with the bottom-up ethos of LEADER, together we have the potential to realise this vision for County Meath over the next four years.

Meath Partnership has developed this quick guide manual on how to access LEADER funding. It will give you an overview on the types of project eligible as well as what we cannot fund. You will also learn what needs to be in place before you apply, the application process and the supports that are provided along the way.

It is a practical resource to be drawn from, and not an exact blueprint for making a funding application. We hope you will find this manual accessible and useful. The information contained within will most likely need to be added to, subtracted from and adapted depending on the nature of your specific project. As you use this training manual, we suggest that you add your own resource material and notes, so that it becomes your library of ideas in terms of your project or business development.

The aim of the LEADER Programme is to promote quality of life in rural areas and support the diversification of the rural economy. With a five year multi-annual programme, €12,748,000 has been allocated to Meath Partnership, through the LEADER Programme, for investment in local projects.



The Step by Step Guide includes information on the LEADER Programme which is already having an impact on the county

LEADER funding and project ideas

There are six distinct yet interconnected streams of funding available under LEADER, each with its own objectives, priorities and budget allocation.

- Diversification into non-agricultural activities
- Business creation and development
- Encouragement of tourism activities
- Basic services for the economy and rural population
- Village renewal and development
- Conservation and upgrade of the rural heritage

Throughout this brochure you will be introduced to these 6 funding streams and shown examples of the types of activities that can be supported under the Programme.



Business creation and development is one of the funding streams.

✓ Diversification into non-agricultural activities

Carving out a successful living from the agricultural industry is becoming more and more difficult in recent times. In order to address sustainability, some farmers must investigate alternative options to generate an income. If you are looking to develop alternative businesses within your farm or create further employment opportunities for family members then we can provide support, advice as well as capital funding for such projects.

Examples of some activities may include:

- Providing on-farm tourism accommodation and facilities
- Eco-tourism activities utilising the natural resources often found on-farms i.e. rivers, forests, bogs, lakes etc
- Open farms or Activity centres
- Recreational facilities for community uses
- Craft workshops or studios
- Farm shops selling home or locally grown produce

✓ Business creation and development

Starting up a new business can be a challenging venture so it is crucial that budding entrepreneurs are encouraged and supported in their efforts. We provides assistance to new business start-ups as well as existing enterprises, so that they can continue to create employment and develop the local economy. If you are considering starting a new business or are currently in business and looking to grow or re-focus, assistance may be available under the LEADER Programme.

We provide a range of supports, including:

- Capital grants for investment in new equipment, buildings and support for the adoption of new technologies
- Grant aid to develop innovative products and activities
- Support for business networks, collective marketing and training
- Activities to encourage rural entrepreneurship
- Feasibility and Analysis & Development grants for new products or services

Funding for mainstream enterprises are not eligible under this particular measure.

✓ Encouragement of tourism activities

With an abundance of natural beauty, heritage, and culture, County Meath is rich in tourism potential. In Meath Partnership we are dedicated to developing and growing the tourism industry in order to create and sustain local employment. Through LEADER we provide capital grant aid to develop tourist amenities and build on the overall attractiveness of County Meath for tourists and residents alike.

Some examples of activities that we can fund through LEADER are:

- Tourism accommodation including caravan and camping parks
- Support for the creation of niche tourism products such as those based on arts and crafts, ecotourism, genealogy, archaeology etc.
- Support for bringing your business online by using the internet and e-business facilities enabling booking and information services to tourists
- Tourism marketing at local level
- Training for tourism providers, both business and community
- Capital grant aid to enhance or develop your existing tourism business with a special focus on recreational facilities and a broad range of activity based developments.

Capital grant aid of up to €150,000 per project is available to support the development of new micro-enterprises or support the expansion of existing businesses in rural areas.



✓ Basic services for the economy and rural population

We believe in the importance of supporting rural communities throughout the county. We are dedicated to assisting their growth through the provision of adequate amenities and services. We also recognise that different communities have different requirements. There is no one solution to fit all. In Meath Partnership we work with communities to provide a tailored response to their individual needs.

The types of project eligible under this measure include:

- Amenity and leisure facilities
- Support for cultural activities
- Certain arts facilities
- General community and recreational infrastructure playgrounds/walkways
- Innovative activities in local communities such as social and information networks.

Activities and facilities that are provided by mainstream government agencies and service providers are not eligible for support under Basic Services Measure.

✓ Village renewal and development

Villages and small towns are the heart of rural communities and are a priority for development under the LEADER Programme. By developing local villages we can help create a sense of pride and community spirit which leads to improved quality of life for all dwellers. Through LEADER we can fund projects that will develop the local environment, amenities and the overall appearance of small towns and villages throughout the county.

Examples of activities eligible for assistance include:

- Environmental upgrading of parks, civic areas, river walks, cow parks etc.
- Access facilities to local amenities
- Planting and local enhancement schemes
- Upgrading of street lighting and other public utilities
- Renovation of local derelict buildings
- Support for the establishment of farmers markets

All projects involving public areas must be agreed with the local authority in writing in advance of application.

✓ Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage

County Meath has a rich and diverse heritage. Some of the most important historical sites throughout Ireland are found in Meath. Understanding this heritage helps create our identity and sense of self and is therefore an asset that cannot be taken for granted. In Meath Partnership we believe in conserving and protecting this precious resource for generations to come. Whether it is social, cultural or natural heritage, funding is available through LEADER to develop these resources for the good of the local community.

Project ideas may include:

- Actions to preserve and develop vernacular architecture; crafts, archaeology, cultural traditions etc.
- Restoration and development of locally significant natural areas, features and areas of environmental significance
- Community environmental actions to protect and restore the amenity value of local water resources and high value nature areas
- Environmental initiatives aimed at waste reduction
- Alternative or renewable energy actions addressing suitability of new technologies to meet community energy needs; awareness actions for community groups and under certain conditions, capital assistance to community groups adopting such technology.

Projects that encourage proactive initiatives to use local resources to provide renewable energy options for local communities may also be eligible.



Project ideas may include restoration of locally significant features

Who is eligible to apply and for what?

LEADER is a funding initiative open to all! From community and voluntary groups to private individuals and enterprises, LEADER can offer grant aid and support to projects aiming to promote the quality of life and economic opportunities for Meath dwellers. Even if you are not a Meath resident you can still avail of LEADER support once the project is based in the county.

Grant Aid Available: Rates and Amounts

The table below outlines the rates and levels of grant aid available under the LEADER Programme for not-for-profit community organisations and private project promoters:

TYPE OF PROJECT PROMOTER	TYPE OF ASSISTANCE	RATE OF AID	MAX GRANT
Community Group	Capital Works	Up to 75% of eligible costs	€150,000
Community Group	Analysis and Development (A&D)	Up to 90% of eligible costs	€30,000
Community Group	Training	Up to 100% of eligible costs	€150,000
Private Promoter	Capital Works	Up to 50% of eligible costs	€150,000
Private Promoter	Analysis and Development (A&D)	Up to 75% of eligible costs	€30,000
Private Promoter	Training	Up to 100% of eligible costs	€150,000

In certain circumstances, and subject to prior written approval by the Department, grant aid up to €500,000 may be awarded to non-commercial community projects.



Community groups can qualify for 100% of eligible training costs.

Please note that the following are not eligible for LEADER funding:

- Entertainment or hospitality costs
- Working capital (including stock)
- Franchises or franchising costs
- Fees for individual training programmes or courses
- Ongoing overhead costs of the project
- Conventional motor vehicles or motor equipment
- Residential housing or nursing homes
- Costs associated with servicing a loan
- Conventional retail operations
- Insurance costs
- Mainstream activities of sporting clubs and organisations
- Planning Application Fees
- Race Horses or Sport Horses
- Horticulture including bee-keeping

Funding will not be given to the following mainstream activities:

- Agriculture and Fisheries
- Childcare
- Education
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Greyhound Industry
- Race and sport horse industries

The application process explained

This section sets out on a step-by-step basis the process required to successfully access and drawdown LEADER grant aid.

It is worth noting at this point that help is available from the LEADER Team within Meath Partnership, throughout all stages of the Project Life Cycle. We are here to assist you, offer advice, direction and guidance and in many cases act as a sounding board for ideas. Project Promoters (individuals who are carrying out LEADER supported projects) that invest in the relationship with the Project Team in Meath Partnership will yield significant benefits across a spectrum of supports available within the organisation. The benefits of a sound, two-way professional relationship are huge. Once both parties have developed a mutual confidence and trust, things tend to move quickly. Any reticence on the part of a potential applicant in disclosing private information lessens once s/he comes to trust the people (and organisation) with which they are dealing. Respect for confidentiality is of utmost importance to us as a Company owing to the often commercially sensitive nature of the information supplied to us.

At Meath Partnership, we are committed to working with all project promoters over a five year period and will commit resources to ensure the best possible outcome for the individual or community seeking to enhance quality of life in County Meath.

Quick checklist if considering an application for LEADER:

As a guiding principle, Meath Partnership will consider projects of an enterprise nature by reference to the following:

- Compatible with the LEADER Business Plan for Meath
- The innovative nature of the project proposed
- The market for the proposed product or service
- The economic viability of the project proposed
- The capacity of the project to create new direct employment, either full or part-time or seasonal, or should as a minimum, contribute directly to the maintenance of employment in existing small enterprises
- Adequate overall finance will be available to the promoter to successfully fund and complete the project.
- The promoter possesses sufficient management and technical capacity to implement the proposed project.

As a guiding principle, Meath Partnership will consider projects of a community nature by reference to the following:

- Compatible with the LEADER Business Plan for Meath
- The capacity and track record of the community promoter to implement the proposed project
- The innovative nature of the project proposed
- The need for the proposed project and benefit to those living or working in the local community
- The economic viability of the project proposed and whether adequate overall finance will be available to the promoter to successfully fund and complete the project
- The fundraising record of the community group

The application process - a snapshot

Step 1: Initial Enquiry, followed by 1 Page Project Outline

Step 2: Issued with the Step-by-Step Guide and further Information

Step 3: Meeting with a Project Officer either in-house or on the site of the proposed project

Step 4: If eligible for support, Letter and Application Form issued – guidance and advice available at this stage

Step 5: Letter of Acknowledgement sent once fully completed Application Form and accompanying documentation received by Meath Partnership

Step 6: Initial Assessment for funding by the Project Appraisal Team (PAT)

Step 7: Consideration of PAT recommendation by the Board of Meath Partnership and decision issued

Step 8: Letter of Offer (or refusal) and Contract issued and project can commence

Step 9: Progress report and ongoing contact with LEADER team

Step 10: On completion of project, drawdown of grant aid

Step 11: Payment of Grant

Step 1: Initial Enquiries

Upon making an initial enquiry to Meath Partnership, it is necessary to submit a simple outline covering the basic aspects of your project idea – who, what, when, where, how and why. A dedicated Projects Officer will then respond to confirm whether your project is eligible for LEADER funding or may recommend an alternative source of funding, where applicable. Typically, enquiries fall into two broad categories:

- Private / commercial ventures or
- Community projects which tend to be non-profit making in nature

Step 2: Issued with further information

You will then be issued with further information detailing the procedures necessary for applying for and receiving funding.

Step 3: Making Personal Contact...the first exploratory meeting

If eligible, you will be invited into Meath Partnership's office for an informal meeting or a Projects Officer will visit you onsite to discuss the potential of the project to attract LEADER support and outline the process involved. The purpose of the meeting is threefold:

1. It is a prime opportunity for you to explain the potential of the project and for us to identify the suitability and eligibility of the entire, or parts of the, project for LEADER support
2. To establish a relationship with Meath Partnership
3. It provides us with an opportunity to discuss the project process with you from application to completion. We will also clearly state the level of documentation that is required at each stage.

This initial meeting will inform you fully and enable you to decide if you wish to proceed with an application to LEADER. It ensures that there will be 'no surprises' further down the line. This meeting will be followed up with a formal letter summarising what was discussed.

Step 4: Making a Formal Application...the journey begins

Having carefully considered the process involved and explored the funding options available, promoters who wish to apply for LEADER funding must make a formal application. A completed application form must be accompanied by the following in order to constitute a formal application to the LEADER Programme:

- A business plan or community action plan: to include financial projections for 5 years and a marketing plan for at least 3 years
- Competitive quotes for the LEADER elements of the proposed project (showing the VAT element separately)
- Tax Clearance Certificate for the Promoter
- Set of audited accounts and most recent annual report (as applicable)
- Architects plans and planning permission (where appropriate)
- Tax Clearance Certificate or C2 Certificate for any contractor or service provider engaged in the project
- Evidence from Revenue of the VAT status of the promoter
- Financial capacity – details on the promoters ability to deliver the project while waiting for grant aid e.g. bridging, loans, fundraising etc.
- Any other relevant information in relation to the proposed project

Developing the Business Plan or Community Action Plan

The key to success is planning. If your idea is not viable, the process of drawing up a workable plan will confirm this before you squander valuable time, energy and resources. In any event, to turn your project idea into a reality and manage it successfully, you need a plan – if only so that there is a benchmark to measure against and deviate from. Your plan is the first thing any reputable funding provider will ask to see, so you should structure it clearly and make sure it is well written.

Business Plan Development

The table below highlights some of the key considerations that should be taken into account when writing the Business Plan and draws attention to the common deficits that occur in Business Plan development.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Quality surpasses quantity
- Executive summary is critical
- First impressions are important
- Be realistic
- Be specific and accurate
- Be brief
- Use positive language
- Good layout
- Clear focus
- SWOT analysis

FAILINGS OF A BUSINESS PLAN

- Bad financials
- Poorly defined target market
- Poorly presented / structured
- Too many pages
- Over emphasis on presenter's qualifications
- Too optimistic
- Underestimate risk
- Sell too hard
- Spelling / grammatical mistakes
- Cross referencing
- Use of jargon

Community Action Plan Development

Meath Partnership is encouraging Local Groups and Community Organisations to develop 3 year Community Action Plans prioritising the needs and objectives of the community into a realisable Programme of Activities. Once a detailed Community Action Plan has been submitted, we will contract with local development groups on a multi-annual funding cycle, committing to deliver a more comprehensive funding package to successful applicants.

The Community Action Plan is a road map for creating community change by specifying what will be done, who will do it and how it will be done. The Plan should contain three core elements:

- What the community group want to accomplish
- What activities are needed during a specified timeline
- What resources (money, people, materials and voluntary labour input) are needed to be successful

User-friendly templates are available to assist you in building your Business Plan or Community Action Plan and we also provide training throughout the year to assist you in this process.

The templates can be accessed directly through Meath Partnership's website at www.meathpartnership.ie or by calling the office on 046 9280790 or emailing leader@meathpartnership.ie



Templates are available on the Meath Partnership website

Step 5: Letter of Acknowledgement

Once a completed formal application for funding has been received by Meath Partnership, a Letter of Acknowledgement will be sent to you. At this point, we are in a position to proceed to process the application - request additional paperwork, undertake an initial site visit and work alongside you to assist in the delivery of the project.

Step 6: Project Assessment and Decision Making Process

The Project Appraisal Team (PAT) is an independent external team of experts drawn from the world of business, community, planning, and banking to review and evaluate all proposals for financial assistance under the LEADER Programme.

The PAT do not make decisions in relation to the award of funding, they simply make recommendations to the Board of Meath Partnership.

The primary concerns of the PAT are the financial capacity of the Promoter and the sustainability of the Project over a five year period. The key questions examined and scrutinised by the PAT are:

- How does the promoter intend to fund the project e.g. fundraising, bank loan, private resources?
- Has the promoter the capacity to undertake this project in full if approved LEADER grant aid?
- What is the funding mix available to this project? The promoter has to show that they can get the funds to undertake the project and pay for it while awaiting their LEADER grant aid. This is particularly important for all large scale and/or enterprise type projects under all measures (i.e. Agriculture, Tourism, Enterprise and Environment).
- What is the existing income of the promoter?
- Can the promoter proceed without LEADER assistance (deadweight)?
- Interagency Cross Check - are funds being sought or being provided by another state funding agency?
- Is the promoter tax compliant i.e. evidence of a tax clearance certificate or C2 cert

Step 7: Consideration of PAT recommendation by the Board of Meath Partnership and decision issued

Upon successful appraisal of the application, a formal recommendation is submitted to the Board of Meath Partnership for Final Approval. The Board of Meath Partnership consider very carefully each project presented to them paying particular attention to the cumulative impact the projects have in terms of delivering the Business Plan for the LEADER Programme in County Meath.

Step 8: Letter of Offer (or refusal) and Contract issued and project can commence

A Letter of Offer (or in some case rejection) is sent to the promoter, enclosing a contract and checklist of items for drawdown.

Step 9: Progress Report

Work commences and the Promoter regularly updates Meath Partnership on project progress. Depending on the scale and duration of the Project, throughout the project development phase a number of site visits will be conducted by the Project Officer to document the progress of the project and provide ongoing support and mentoring to the project promoter.

Step 10: Drawdown of Grant

On completion of the project, the relevant claims forms are completed and submitted to Meath Partnership. There is also further documentation that must be in place before the grant is paid out. Some of the key ones are listed below:

- Original invoices, receipts and proof of payment in respect of eligible expenditure
- Evidence of full and appropriate insurance cover
- Certificate of compliance with Planning Permission (if applicable)
- Original current Tax Clearance Certificate
- Compliance with any other special conditions as outlined in the letter of offer

A full list will be provided to you on receipt of your offer of grant aid

Step 11: Payment of Grant

Meath Partnership makes a payment to the Promoter by Internet Business Banking or cheque

Timeframe for a Decision

Once a completed application is received it will typically take one month before a decision is made. The deadline for submission of completed applications is the last Friday of the month for approval the following month.

Additional supports

Meath Partnership will continue to support the project after the grant has been awarded. We provide training, mentoring, networking and collective branding support for up to five years.

Training

Meath Partnership is committed to creating and delivering new and relevant training programmes for rural entrepreneurs, communities and existing businesses. These training programmes are delivered at our training centre; the Dr Curran Centre of Learning, Kells Business Park and through a range of community-based outreach locations in Meath. Meath Partnership, working with leading training providers is delivering a series of training programmes and workshops including the following:



Training includes supports for on-farm enterprise

- Business Options Programme
- Marketing your Tourism Business
- Options for On-Farm Enterprise
- Renewable Energy Enterprise Development
- Festival and Event Organisation and Management
- Writing a Business Plan for your New Rural Enterprise
- Marketing Your Business using Online Social Media
- The Fundamentals of Social and Community Enterprise

For more information on the range of training courses available or to register for our training courses, log onto our website www.meathpartnership.ie or contact Meath Partnership on 046 9280790.

Networking and Mentoring

Meath Partnership provides funding and supports to facilitate the networking of enterprises, both sectoral and cross sectoral. Members benefit from collective marketing, relevant training and business development support. To date we have supported the establishment of The Artisan Foods of Meath Network, The Elevation Network: Fostering Rural Entrepreneurship in Meath, Micro-Enterprise Support and Development Network, Meath Craft Network, Meath Performers Network and Festival Organisers Network. Advice is also provided through our online business mentoring programme 'Silent K' at www.silentknowledge.eu

Collective Marketing and Branding

Meath Partnership can assist networks or groups of businesses to develop collective marketing or branding strategies. The production of collective marketing and branding material such as brochures, websites, promotional videos can be grant aided at a rate of 50% of actual costs. This will help them to successfully promote their businesses collectively for the benefit of all its members.

Through LEADER funding we have over 10 million to invest in and with rural communities in Co Meath before 2014. This funding provides a unique opportunity for community groups and entrepreneurs to invest in their local area and harness these funds for the benefit of current and future generations in Meath. In Meath Partnership we are dedicated to working closely with organisations and individuals to ensure we provide you with effective and relevant support throughout this unique development and investment opportunity.

For more information contact us on 046 9280 790 or email info@meathpartnership.ie

Checklist

- Completed Application Form
- Constitution or
- Memorandum and Articles of Association
- Business Plan/Community Action Plan
- Quotations
- Letters of Support
- Architects Drawings/Maps
- Title/Lease
- Planning Permission
- Accounts
- Financial Capacity
- Tax Clearance of Promoter
- VAT status
- Voluntary Labour Sheet
- Insurance
- Bank Account

Items required may vary depending on the type of project.

Contact Us

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"The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas".



Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government

