Breathe new life into your **community**

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Introducing LEADER

LEADER grants, LEADER funding, LEADER support – you may have heard these terms before, but what is it all about? Here are the facts: LEADER is judged to be one of the most successful initiatives ever to come from Europe. It's a regeneration initiative that is working!

This European Union and Irish Government Funded programme focuses on the development of rural areas economically, socially and culturally. Meath Partnership is responsible for the delivery of the LEADER Programme in County Meath and has over €10 million in funding to deploy between now and 2014.

LEADER is a community-based approach that allows local communities to identify their own needs and devise appropriate solutions. It is important that projects supported through the LEADER programme produce sustainable impacts that continue after the funding has come to an end.

A great many Meath residents will have felt the benefits of LEADER in terms of jobs created in new enterprises, enhanced community buildings and support for essential services. However, the benefits of LEADER are not simply felt in monetary terms – the real value is the enormous amount of effort and community spirit behind these projects.

The essence of any LEADER project is the rural community coming together with new ideas and innovations and working together to achieve one common goal. It is vital, especially in these challenging times, that local communities determine what they require, be it facilities or services and that you work with LEADER to make these a reality.



What's inside...

This booklet will take you through the types of support and funding available, how to get help with planning your project as well as profiles on successful LEADER projects in Co Meath.

We hope it will provide inspiration to community groups looking to invest in their local communities.

The community booklet consists of the following sections:

- Details of Grant Aid and examples of eligible projects
- Training and Information
- Basic Services for the Rural Communities
- Village Renewal and Development
- Heritage Projects
- Festivals
- Networking Opportunities
- Community Action Planning



Funding for communities

Up to €150,000 grant aid available for each community project

We can invest in a wide range of community projects; some examples of the types of project eligible are listed below.

- Upgrade environmental parks, civic areas, river walks, cow parks
- Provide access facilities to local amenities
- Upgrade street lighting and other public utilities
- Renovate local derelict buildings
- Support the establishment of farmers markets
- Upgrade the amenity and leisure facilities in your area
- Local enhancement and planting schemes
- Restore and develop locally significant natural areas and features
- Improved environmental initiatives aimed at waste reduction.
- Support with running a new or existing festival.
- Support for the application of renewable energy technologies in community buildings

If you have an idea for a project, then you should contact us to see if your community group or organisation may be eligible for LEADER funding. With over €10 million to invest over the next four years, we can help your organisation work to revitalise your local area.

LEADER funding is available at a rate of up to:

- 100% for training costs
- 90% of cost for technical support
- 75% of cost for capital projects

The maximum combined grant limit is €200,000 in any one three year period. (Large community projects which do not involve economic activity may qualify for flagship status which carries maximum grant aid of up to €500,000)

Training and information Learn a new skill or discover a hidden talent!

Meath Partnership is committed to delivering new and relevant training programmes for rural residents. We work with rural communities to identify specialised training requirements that will meet their needs.

The training is designed to provide groups with the specific knowledge and skills needed to initiate and develop projects in their local communities. These training programmes will be delivered in our new training centre at the Dr. Curran Centre of Learning at Kells Business Park, as well as community-based outreach locations across the county. We work with leading training providers to deliver a series of training programmes including:

- Funding Application Workshop
- Managing Community Finance
- Managing Community Centres/ Assets
- Fundraising Skills Workshops
- Hospitality Management Training
- Festival and Event Management
- Certificate in Community Development
- Village Action Planning
- · Community and Social Enterprise

If you have an idea for a project, then you should contact us to see if your community group or organisation may be eligible for LEADER funding. With over €10 million to invest over the next four years, we can help your organisation work to revitalise your local area.

Funding at the heart of the community!

In Meath Partnership we work to improve the quality of life enjoyed by rural populations. We provide grants for basic infrastructure, leisure, cultural and arts facilities.

Funding can be provided for a wide range of projects under the following headings:

- Amenity and leisure facilities
- Support for cultural activities
- Certain arts facilities
- General community and recreational infrastructure
- Innovation activities in local communities such as social and information networks etc
- Support can also be provided towards the cost of feasibility studies

(Activities and facilities that are provided by mainstream government agencies are not eligible for support under Basic Services Measure)

If you have an idea to improve the basic services in your rural area, the Rural Development Team are available to discuss your idea with you in greater detail to determine if you may be eligible for funding.



St James Hall, Athboy

Athboy is a small agricultural town in Co Meath with a population of just under 2,500. Over the years the people of Athboy have successfully mobilised themselves to take advantage of grants available for the benefit of their local community.



It's a town with a tremendous community spirit 'Probably the best anywhere' says Eamonn Cassells, from Athboy Community Forum. 'If there's a worthwhile project going on in Athboy, people really put their shoulder to the wheel and get behind it.'

Athboy Community Forum was initially set up in 1996 to identify projects eligible for funding and to apply for the grants. 'We were not very good at the start' admits Eamonn 'we didn't really know the 'in's and out's' of the application process but we were well supported by Meath Partnership and they helped us through. We got funding from LEADER to do a couple of jobs and that really kick-started it all. We found that if you really went about it in the right way, funding was available and we've embarked on a lot of projects since then'.

One of the most recent and successful projects was the renovation of St James Hall in the centre of Athboy. The hall had fallen into a serious state of disrepair over the years. The Community Forum recognised that the hall was an amenity that they couldn't afford to do without, so they drew up the plans and applied for LEADER funding. 'We got a grant of over 60 thousand to redevelop the hall and



that was enough to bring it back to its original glory – with a modern twist!! We got a new roof put on, plumbing repaired, new toilet facilities, 2 new boilers for heating, the whole place was redecorated, the stage facilities were renewed to a high spec, we got a new lighting system and new curtains – it's really a super job.'

St James' Hall is used by the entire community and it has become a hub of activity on any day of the week. 'It's used every day in some capacity' says Eamonn 'In fact it gets so busy that our biggest problem is that there are so many people that want to use it and we can't fit them all it – but I suppose that's a good complaint!'

Eamonn believes 'success breathes success.' He said that when people see things developing positively they really row in behind the project. 'We are lucky that we have good community leaders who are prepared to step out there in front and you need that. They identify the projects and the whole community get's in behind them.'



Ballinacree, a small village in north Meath have undertaken a lot of projects with the support of LEADER. To date Ballinacree Community Association has completed a variety of community projects from the restoration and upgrade of the community centre to the resurfacing of the community car park.

Valuing our sense of place Village renewal and development

We are dedicated to the development of small towns and villages in Co Meath. We have a vision to grow and support a vibrant economic, social and cultural life for Meath residents while cherishing the history and heritage of both people and place. The LEADER Programme provides a broad range of support for communities wishing to enhance and upgrade their local environment.

Examples of what can be funded:

- Heritage conservation
- Landscaping
- Development of amenity areas and public spaces
- Signage
- Walking trails
- Water features
- Seating
- ...and much more

People are of primary importance in village renewal and development and we recognise that it is the community themselves that drives change. Meath Partnership offers support and direction for those community leaders who look for funding to better their community. A number of small towns, village and community groups in County Meath have already received LEADER funding for enhancement works

If your group has an idea for a project to enhance your local village or community, then please get in touch. We are actively seeking eligible projects to work with



Fordstown Village Enhancement

Fordstown Community Development Association was set up in 2005. 'A few of us got together to try and improve the area. It had become very run down and overgrown and just needed a bit of attention' said Stephanie Bray, Fordstown. 'We took things slowly at the start, entering the Litter League in the first year and we did quite well in that. We then entered the Pride of Place competition and were delighted to be awarded best new entrant. I suppose that little bit of success gave us the confidence and encouragement we needed to keep going. In 2006 we got ourselves together to apply for LEADER funding to do a larger enhancement project in the village.'

'LEADER was a great help to us. With their support we were able to plant more flower beds around the area, restore the monument and stone wall and put up a new heritage sign telling the history of the area. Every year do a little extra and every year we do a little better. We won our category in the Pride of Place last year and the year before and the LEADER funding has really helped us with that.'

'We are lucky that we have a lot of dedicated people in our community, with good drive behind them. The lads enjoy getting together and I think it's important at the end of the evening that they have the tea and few sandwiches so that there is a social element to it as well. Fordstown is renowned throughout the county for its great community spirit and for getting things done. It's a real community effort, once people see the benefits they just get on board and it's just become part of community life in Fordstown.'



Fordstown benefitted from LEADER funding

Stephanie talks about how they found accessing the LEADER funding. 'Initially the paperwork was quite daunting, but once we got stuck in it wasn't that hard. It's really just a matter of sitting down and doing it. LEADER was very patient and they were a great support to us. They stuck with us and we stuck with them, so together we made a success of it!'

The Fordstown group don't intend to rest on their laurels either. 'At the minute our big focus is on keeping it as good as it is. But we do have plans for future improvements. We want to extend the grass verges down the Athboy road another couple of hundred metres. We are also looking at getting some community lighting. We are always enhancing and maintaining to keep up our high standards.'



Ballinlough Pride of Place was awarded LEADER funding for the enhancement and development of the village. The group have done a substantial landscaping project throughout the village including planting of semi mature trees, the creation of colourful floral and shrub beds and the placement of hanging baskets and window boxes.



Unearthing and cherishing our heritage!

County Meath is rich in local, natural and built heritage. It is a challenge for local communities to safeguard their local heritage for future generations to come. Meath Partnership is dedicated to working with these community groups in the conserving and upgrading of our rural heritage here in County Meath.

We support community heritage projects to create an interest in local heritage, whether they are natural, built or cultural. We can aid in the interpretation of the local heritage and environment of the county, develop and promote the arts and crafts sector and document a wealth of historical information.

Do you know of any local historical features or natural areas which may benefit from enhancement and upgrading for the enjoyment and appreciation of the local community?

If you have an idea about conserving, upgrading, celebrating or showcasing our rich heritage, please contact Meath Partnership. We can help turn your ideas into actions!



Athboy ICA

Athboy ICA celebrated their 50th anniversary late last year. To mark this momentous occasion the members compiled a book documenting the work, activities and contribution of Athboy ICA down through the year. Mary Jo Needham, the President of the Athboy Guild speaks about how they got the project together.



Athboy ICA recently celebrated their 50th anniversary

'For the 40 year celebrations we ran an exhibition of photographs and other memorabilia. It was a great success and we were really surprised by the amount of material we unearthed. I just thought that someday, somewhere, a writer had to put this into book form, there was just too much valuable information in this to lose! We decided to put a book together for the 50th anniversary and were delighted to finally launch it on the 7th of November 2010.

'There was dreadful weather on the day of the launch and I was really worried that people wouldn't show up, but thankfully they came out in force. People travelled from near and far, we even had members from the early guilds there with their children and grandchildren. The launch was supposed to last from 3 until 6 but it went on until nearly 8 o' clock. People were so busy catching up and rekindling old friendships. The book has since gone to the 4 corners of the world. We even got an email from someone in an island off the coast of Australia saying how much she enjoyed reading it. I think it is particularly special for people that are abroad

as it brought back the memories of times past. I believe books like these are very important as they show how Ireland has changed so rapidly in the last number of years.'

'The ICA was a very important outlet for women in days gone by' says Mary Jo 'They couldn't got to the pub as they had children to mind and housework to do, but one night a week it was acceptable to go to the ICA. At our launch event last year, Cathaoirleach Shane Cassells spoke of how they prayed the rosary in his house every night of the week except on the night of the ICA when his mother would be getting a lift and it was ok to skip the rosary for that night. This will give you an idea of how important the ICA was to women back then.'

"We were doing everything on a shoestring at the start but LEADER funding meant that we could produce the book to a very high spec"

LEADER funding was crucial to the production of the book. 'We were doing everything on a shoestring at the start but LEADER funding meant that we could produce the book to a very high spec. It was a wonderful experience for the ICA putting together this book. It really gave us a sense of pride in our organisation and a great understanding of the women who went before us. I think books like this are invaluable as they are a chronicle of what went on from a previous era. It may only be 50 years ago but life has changed so much even from the 80's in Ireland, I believe it's important that we don't forget where we've come from.



Celebrating and creating top class festivals!

Throughout the year County Meath is awakened with vibrant festivals. From agricultural shows, to heritage and cultural festivals there is something to suit every taste. Our festivals are held to celebrate or commemorate, to raise funds, to promote a cause or an activity or purely to entertain. Whatever their motivation, improving the quality of festivals will result in increased positive social and economic impacts for County Meath.

We have a dedicated 'Festival Advisor' to support new and established festivals in the county. The Festival Advisor will meet with local committees to support them with every aspect of festival development. He will also work as back up support in and around festival planning and help investigate the viability of the festival long term. In Meath Partnership we can also provide capital funding for festivals as well as additional support through networking and training.

- ✓ Do you need help in developing a festival management plan for your festival?
- ✔ Do you require specialist support for your festivals development and sustainability?
- ✓ Do you require financial support to develop, enhance and grow your festival?
- ✓ Are you interested in joining a network of festival committees to share and exchange information, knowledge and resources?

Whether you are thinking about starting a new festival or are already running one in Co Meath then our dedicated Festival Advisor can offer you a wide range of supports, free of charge!



Trim Hot Air Balloon Fiesta, supported by LEADER

Royal Meath Agricultural Show

Trim Agricultural Show has been in existence for over 70 years 'and it keeps getting bigger and bigger', says Rosemary Swan, Chairperson of the Show 'Although it can be difficult to keep these type of events going, we've been very lucky in Trim as there's always been a great interest within the farming community to keep the show on the road!



There is great interest within the farming community in Trim Agricultural Show

Between 4 and 7 thousand people attend Trim Show every year. 'It really depends on the weather' says Rosemary. 'If it's a good day people will come out in their droves, but if it's wet we wouldn't get quite the same numbers. The show is very much a day for the whole family so it's important to have something to entertain all ages. We have a Bonnie Baby competition, a Master and Miss Trim, face painting, egg and spoon, sack and wheelbarrow races and tug-o-war and much more'.

However the main attractions of the show are the agricultural competitions and these continue to grow every year. 'The horse section last year was absolutely enormous' says Rosemary 'We've the biggest goat show in the country and a very big cattle section that's increasing every year. We have the second largest

Hereford Show in the country and we always get an English judge over for that which causes a lovely bit of a stir. There's great enthusiasm about it and the exhibitors are always asking – 'who's judging it Rosemary, but I always try and keep it as a big surprise!

'LEADER funding was an enormous boost to us. We used the funding for cattle ties and to get new cages in the poultry section. It is very hard to raise money particularly in today's economy so knowing that LEADER was there was a great support. We hope to apply for LEADER funding next year to invest in jumps in the horsing section. We've got all the paperwork done now so it will be very easy once we decide exactly what we need!'

There's a major sense of achievement when it's completed – a lot of people would be very traditional and wouldn't like to see anything happening to it'

'I was brought up as a child going to Trim show so I have a great love for it. I enjoy that simple way of country life, meeting people, farmers, having the bit of craic. I think these parts of Irish rural life are very important and a real effort should be made to preserve them.' Rosemary hopes that the show will continue to for years to come 'The first 70 years of The Royal Meath Agricultural Show were very successful so hopefully the next 70 will be just as fruitful!'



With over 70 years behind it, Trim Agricultural Show is becoming part of Trim's rich history

Bringing Arts Alive

Meath Performers Network

County Meath has a wealth of talented performing art groups in the cultural and musical entertainment sector. Our communities are alive with performing arts, music, dance, song and stage. From traditional to classical, from show tunes to sacred hymns, Meath has talented groups and individuals performing them.

Meath Partnership is committed to further developing the performing arts in the county. We can provide support to local performance groups through funding of equipment, banners, uniforms etc to further develop performing arts in County Meath.

To date we have brought together a number of performers under the umbrella of 'Meath Performers'. This brand identity means that the performers can now collectively promote themselves on a local and national level. They're a talent bunch - and we're not the only ones signing their praises! Meath's Performers have captivated audiences and won awards on regional, national and international stages. Their achievements speak for themselves.



Meath's communities are alive with the arts

Navan Choral Festival

The first Navan Choral Festival took place in 1979. Now in its 32nd year the festival has grown into a celebrated national event for talented choirs, solo singers and pianists. It initially began as a one and a half day event, however with the recent support of LEADER it has been extended to a 4 day annual festival. Choirs of all ages and backgrounds compete to make their mark in this prestigious competition.



Top class choirs from all over the country compete for the 'National Choir of the Year Perpetual Cup'

The festival runs from the Thursday through to Sunday after the May Bank Holiday weekend. Choirs from Primary and Secondary Schools compete on Thursday and Friday with the soloist and pianist competing on Saturday. The main event of the festival takes place on the Sunday evening where top class choirs from all over the country compete for 'The National Choir of the Year Perpetual Cup'.

'There's always a great atmosphere at the festival. We've been complimented many times by people saying they just love coming to Navan Choral Festival. It a combination of the professional way it is delivered mixed in with the very human element' says Sean.

Sean talks about the how LEADER funding has supported the festival. 'We always had difficulties with the hiring the stage each year as it took a large portion of our budget. We located the perfect stepping stage a few years ago and we were able to buy it with the help of LEADER funding. Funding is gone from almost everywhere so knowing that they are there is very reassuring in the present economic climate. LEADER were also very helpful at advising us about other areas where we could improve the running of our Festival. For me, LEADER were great as they had a sensible approach to the money – they weren't wasteful but kept encouraging us to improve things and they kept us on our toes too to make sure we got value for money.

"it's actually very much a fellowship, a cultural event and a wonderful asset to our town."

Navan Choral Festival brings about 3000 people to the town. 'In the past there was a sense of 'The Choral Festival is on ...and the Choral Festival is over'. But for the last 4 or 5 years there has actually been an awakening and awareness of what Navan Choral Festival is all about. If there's one thing about Navan Choral Festival it's that it's not commercial – it's actually very much a fellowship, a cultural event and a wonderful asset to our town. We have big plans for the Choral Festival and hopefully with LEADER support we will continue to grow and develop over the next few years.'



Navan Choral Festival brings about 3,000 people to the town

Community Action Planning Issues to consider

Rural Development can take many forms, but the need to create a sustainable community with a high quality of life has become increasingly important. We have detailed a number of issues your group should consider when undertaking a project;

✓ Have you set up or formed a steering group/ committee?

If not, then you need to call a meeting and see if there is enough interest to proceed. To do this you will need to:

- Select a venue
- Publicise the event
- Personally invite representatives
- Plan the meeting, and
- Stress the benefits.

You should determine your long term goals and shorter term plans which will form the basis of your community action plan. It will be useful to set realistic targets for your group. In your first meeting you should elect officers to ensure your group is properly structured. This involves allocating roles and responsibilities, which will ultimately result in clarity regarding functions attaching to each elected position. Such roles and responsibilities may include Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, Public Relation Officer (PRO), etc.

Once this meeting takes place, your steering group should start to emerge. This will allow for precise decision making, reporting and financial management. Your group will need a tax clearance certificate which you can get through the Revenue Commissioners. A tax clearance certificate is required in order for your group to apply for funding under the LEADER programme. A bank or credit union account should also be set up for the group which will require a minimum of two signatures. Contact your local bank or credit union to obtain more information about this. Insurance is also another important requirement which your group will need for holding events and carrying out works.

✓ Has your group insurance in place?

The committee is responsible for ensuring all insurances are taken out, paid and kept up to date. If your group is hiring out a community centre you should be covered by the community centre's insurance but it is important to check this out first. If your group is looking to take out its own insurance it is advisable to get several quotations and seek advice on the types of insurance you will need. Some examples of insurance could be;

- Buildings insurance,
- Public liability insurance,
- Professional indemnity insurance,
- · Employers liability insurance or
- Contents insurance.

'The Wheel' has a group purchasing insurance facility exclusive to all its members. Groups from the community and voluntary sector can avail of these economical insurance rates once they become members of The Wheel. For more information check out www.wheel.ie/insurance

✓ Does your group have a constitution?

People coming together to form a community group or organisation will usually have a written agreement between the organisation and its members known as a constitution. By far the most common kind of constitutional structure for voluntary and community groups is the voluntary association. Its operating rules will typically be titled the Constitution.

It is basically a written document that sets out how a group or organisation works. The form and content of the constitution will reflect the character and needs of each specific group or organisation. The basic items which are likely to be covered by a constitution are: Purposes and Objects, Powers, Membership and Structure of Board/Management Committee

Have you thought about fundraising?

A primary resource for any group or organisation is fund raising. As well as generating money for the group's activities, it also generates enthusiasm in the local community. Any group will need funds for rent, light, heating, insurance, stationary, printing and other running costs. These are funds that the group must generate themselves either through planned fundraising activities or sponsorship. Projects in your community action plan may well need funding too. Remember LEADER grant aid for capital projects is set a maximum of 75% of cost with a grant limit of €150,000.

Did you determine the needs of your local community?

Your community action plan should be a real agent of change. That means that it must be more than a picture of your community at the present time. You will need to profile your existing community examining the age, gender, household structure, types of community facilities and assets in the area, other groups and organisations, etc. Your community action plan must also be an assessment of your community's strengths and weaknesses. In order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of your local community you will need to carry out a needs analysis or assessment. This can be done by developing a small questionnaire with key questions to find out what the issues are. This can be circulated to all households in your community. You can also hold a community consultation event to ask the people in the community for their opinion. You can carry out a SWOT analysis of your local community which focuses on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Developing your community action plan

Once you have all the information you need, including the needs of the local community, you can begin to develop your community action plan in a clear and easy to understand format. 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. In other words the plan describes

- · What your group wants to accomplish,
- What activities are needed during a specified timeframe,
- What resources (money, people and materials) are needed to be successful

This plan is a key document for your group or organisation at local level. It will form the basis of your community's future and also aid in making applications of funding.

Steps for completing the community action plan;

- 1. Review and analyse community information
- 2. With engagement from your community stakeholders, including residents, review and analyse feedback from the community.
- 3. Choose a group of people to work together on writing the action plan
- 4. Prioritise issues from assessment and community input.
- 5. Identify necessary resources related to achieving your goal
- 6. Consider a timeline for undertaking your actions
- 7. Include monitoring and evaluation

The key factors in establishing a sustainable development drive within a community context is the type and amount of time, energy and resources available locally. Look at what proposals the group can actually complete.

Your Community Action Plan will require ongoing evaluation of your actions and financial management.

Through LEADER funding we have in excess of €10 million to invest over the next 4 years in and with rural communities in Co Meath. This funding provides a unique opportunity for community groups to invest in their local area and harness these funds for the benefit of current and future generations of Meath.

In Meath Partnership we are dedicated to working closely with your organisation to ensure we provide you with effective and relevant support throughout the application process.

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

Contact Us

Meath Partnership

Unit 7, Kells Business Park, Cavan Road, Kells, Co. Meath Phone: 046 9280790 Fax: 046 9252335

Email: info@meathpartnership.ie
Web: www.meathpartnership.ie







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

