



Improving communication across the CLLD delivery chain

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This section of the Toolkit is addressed both to Managing Authorities and to LAGs.

What does it mean ‘to communicate’ and why it’s so important that we do this better in LEADER?

To ‘communicate’ comes from the Latin verb ‘communicare’ meaning ‘to share’, it is an active process. This process of sharing between actors lies right at the heart of LEADER and the links it seeks to build and capitalise on. Effective LEADER communication is so much more than merely a transfer of information. The stakeholders and actors involved need to share information, knowledge, experience, objectives, tasks and resources and understand who is responsible for what.

There are so many people, communities and organisations with whom we all need to ‘share’ in different ways and in different activities if LEADER is to deliver its potential now and in the future. LEADER people by and large understand this, but they also frequently identify internal communication within the delivery chain as an area with real needs for improvement.

It is not only internal communication that LEADER needs to concern itself with improving, external communications are also vitally important. If we do not communicate to the rural community how will we inform our strategies, generate projects, extend involvement and strengthen participation? Communicating well with the wider community is also essential if LEADER is to be valued, the approach extended, resources made available and public and political support committed.

Planning

If we are all going to communicate more effectively then the first essential step in improved communications is recognising the needs for improvement and planning. In planning LEADER communication the different actors in the delivery system need to understand the policy and delivery framework, how they fit within this, what they need to communicate within this and what the priorities for improvement are. This includes internal communications within the multi-level governance and delivery structures and external communications to other stakeholders. In developing these plans, the main things which need to be considered are:

- What are we trying to achieve in communicating, the objectives?
- What is it we need to communicate?
- Who should it be communicated with?
- When should it be communicated?
- How should it be communicated e.g. in building on what we do, through animation etc?
- How we will know communication has been effective?

From this analysis we can then plan where the most effective improvements can be made to strengthen the LEADER process.

Objectives

The EC, Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies and LAGs all need to consider their communication needs, be clear about their objectives and plan accordingly. In LEADER there may be complex objectives relating to the information to be communicated but also to the process of communication

itself within the system. Communicating well between and within the EC, Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, LAG partnerships and beneficiaries is essential in developing and sustaining the links and mutual trust which the added value of LEADER is so dependent on. If the different parts of the delivery system don't share a common understanding how can we be sure who is responsible for what? How do we ensure we do the right things and reduce delays or wasted effort?

The delivery system is just one part of the equation; what are the other things we need to consider in planning our communications? Here are some questions to consider, it is for you to think about the answers:

- How can relevant local strategies be developed and local actors engaged if LAGs do not animate and communicate with local people identifying their needs and opportunities?
- How will we know if they are working if we do not ask and listen?
- If LAGs do not share how can they exchange and learn from each other, how can networks be built and the learning be consolidated?
- Finally, if LEADER as a whole does not communicate what is achieved more widely how are we going to justify the resources and commitment required?

Think carefully about your objectives and communication's part within these: what is it you want to share and why? Base your plan upon these.

What do we need to communicate and who do we need to communicate with?

The main players who will be involved in LEADER communications include the EC, Managing Authorities (either individually or through a CLLD steering group), Rural Payment Agencies, National Rural Networks, other LAGs (EAFRD, EMFF etc), LAG members, other rural stakeholder organisations, rural communities and the general public. All these players have their own distinct communications needs within the LEADER delivery and governance structures. What we need to communicate will largely be defined by our place and role in the LEADER system; we need to think about giving and receiving, the targeting of our communications and our objectives. In thinking about what needs to be communicated consider your target audience carefully, who they are, what do they need to know, is it the delivery of information, instructions, guidance or do you need to engage them in two-way communication with feedback? This will influence how you communicate and when.

The main things about which we are likely to need to communicate include:

- Procedures and guidance for LAGs to develop their LDS;
- Operational procedures and guidance for LAGs;
- The LAG and its Local Development Strategy;
- Contact details and methods, communication and feedback procedures;
- Calls for project applications and procedures;
- Selection criteria, processes and decisions;
- Projects, activities and beneficiaries supported;
- Monitoring, reporting and evaluation;
- Cooperation opportunities;
- Other sources of support.

One common approach to improving communications within the delivery system is to organise regular meetings where LAG managers, MAs and PAs can discuss and share their experiences and processes

to better understand each other and their different roles. This improved shared understanding will in turn improve the approach to communications.

In communications the old adage 'less is more' is so often true. Think about the value of what you are communicating to the end user. With new technologies we have an enormous ability to generate more traffic, but we have to consider whether this makes it easier to 'share'?

Far from being better, more communication may be a blockage or lead to misunderstandings by obscuring the core message or its direct relevance to the right people. Be careful, think about it, target effectively, don't send messages or information people don't need. Have you reached those who need to know? Avoid copying all contacts to emails as too much traffic gets in the way. Make sure your communications are relevant to those receiving the message.

When and how should we communicate?

Understanding what the different communication needs are, what needs to be shared and who with are all critical parts of the planning process but if the communication is to be effective so too is when and how you communicate. The needs which underpin your communication objectives, what and who to, will in many respects define your approach and you need to understand what these are in planning when and how to meet them.

You will need to communicate with different people at different times in the LEADER programming and delivery cycle process. As there are very distinct communication requirements at the different stages; who needs to know what and when is perhaps the most important operational planning consideration. It may therefore be helpful to think through the successive stages and what the needs may be.

- Communication from the MA to potential LAGs in launching preparatory support needs to be planned to allow this to happen early in the process, and to allow potential LAGs to contact the right people and involve them in the process.
- Launching the work to prepare the Local Development Strategy will require communication with partners and stakeholder organisations. Implementing this LDS work will necessarily involve group or individual consultations. You need to decide when and how often in the process will you consult, how you will publicise this and how much time is needed for people to participate?
- How will you communicate the next steps, e.g. the LDS is approved and you need to involve people in implementation, publicise the launch etc.
- Moving into implementation, when are you going to communicate the information on applications, the guidance and rules, procedures and criteria, claims and payment arrangements?

One of the main timing related considerations to think about is whether you are allowing enough time, do the immediate recipients need to communicate to others, is a response or interaction needed, how much time will this require? That a message is sent does not comprise communication, it needs to be received; processed and possibly fed back, so you need to make allowance for this. How you communicate also has a direct effect on the timing and time required for good communication and vice versa.

There are so many communications media today that in planning how to communicate effectively you have to think carefully about what it is you are sharing and who with? Consider how you can do this

in a way that is useful and appropriate and how you ensure the information is easily understood and usable. What is being communicated will also have a direct effect on the most appropriate method. Use the right tools for the job, for those you are targeting, use the appropriate language for those involved if you want to be understood, keep it as simple as possible, think about how messages are received and acted on. For example, if a LAG wants to communicate the effectiveness of the LEADER way of doing things to an MA or PA, don't just tell them - why not show them, organise a field trip for them, let them see for themselves?

Websites, Twitter and Facebook are all useful tools, but in their place, e.g. email is not a good way to update guidance, SMS is a good way to alert a specific group of users, Tweets are useful to stimulate discussion within a group, but don't assume universal access. How do these tools fit together? You could for example use SMS to update registered applicants re a change in guidance on the website. LEADER is often relatively unknown, this is a common priority for improvement. If you want to communicate LEADER to the wider public, events or road shows presenting good experiences are effective in communicating and raising awareness about the benefits of LEADER.

LAGs often act in isolation and are poorly networked with each other and particularly with other national rural stakeholders. They do not communicate well what they achieve to this wider community to build credibility and trust in what they can achieve. National LAG networks sharing best practice and communicating this more widely is one way the benefits of LEADER can be better demonstrated and future commitment built.

The most important point here is to make sure people know what the communication methods and channels are, how the information will be shared, avoid assumptions, be specific.

How will we know if our communications have been successful?

Effective communication should generate the desired effect and maintain the effect, with the potential to increase the effect of the message. Therefore, effective communication serves the purpose for which it was planned or designed. Possible purposes might be to elicit change, generate action, create understanding, inform or enquire. When the desired effect is not achieved we need to understand why, to discover how the communication has been ineffective and remedy this. This means that it is important to check that messages, including any feedback, have been received and understood.

Examples from the 2007-2013 period

- [Communication between different actors in Hungary](#) (Anna Parizán from the Hungarian MA)
- [Communication across the delivery chain in Ireland](#) (Deirdre Kelly, MA and Ryan Howard, LAG)
- [The importance for a successful LDS of maintaining an on-going dialogue between LEADER groups and funding authorities](#) (Marjorie Deroi, French MA)

Lessons and practical applications in the 2014-2020 Programming Period

- [Practical examples of innovation and simplification in the LEADER delivery chain](#) (this document presents examples of **improving communication** in the LEADER delivery chain Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands, and UK-Scotland).