

2023-2027 LEADER Programme: How To Apply Guide



Welcome From CAP Network Ireland

Since its inception in 1991, the LEADER programme has played a key role in supporting communities and enterprises in rural areas throughout Ireland. Based on the 'bottom-up' approach to rural development, which empowers local communities to actively participate in decisions affecting their area, the programme has supported projects across a diverse range of themes during this period.

The current 2023-2027 LEADER Programme, funded through Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP), will continue to have a sizeable impact in every corner of rural Ireland.

It is our hope that anyone planning to invest in their own business or community project will find this How to Apply Guide to be a useful resource and that it will be a springboard for the development of new and innovative projects right across the country.

Through our work, CAP Network Ireland will continue to identify and promote good practice LEADER projects; organise and participate in events to build capacity among key stakeholders; and develop resources, such as this one, to increase awareness and engagement with the programme.

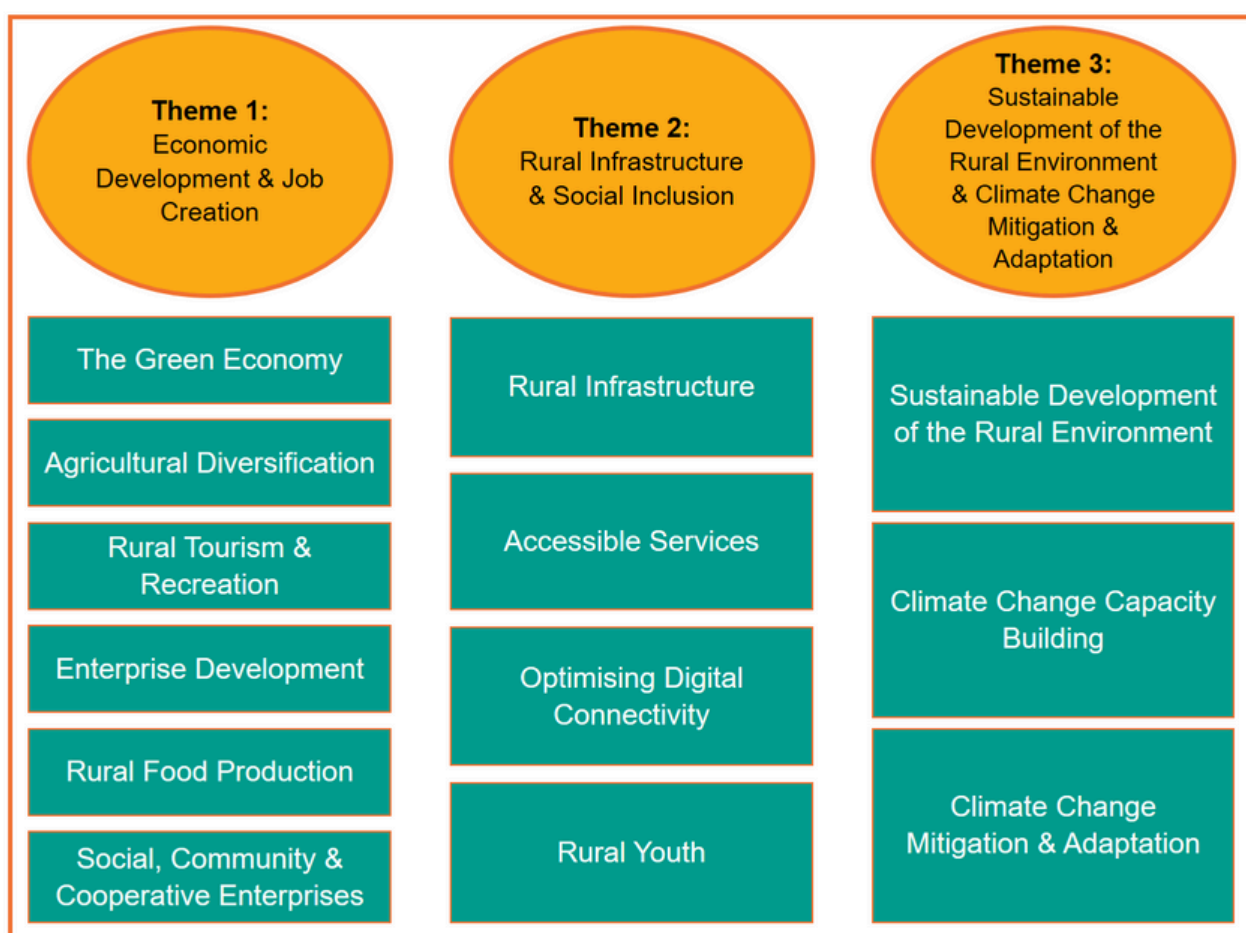


LEADER Programme

The LEADER programme promotes a Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) approach that involves the participation of local communities in developing responses to key economic, environmental and social challenges. LEADER is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), and is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the EU under the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023–2027.

This **How To Apply Guide** outlines the LEADER programme funding process, including key stages and application requirements.

Funding is available under 3 LEADER Themes



The 2023-2027 LEADER Programme provides resources to promote the sustainable development of rural communities. Projects receive funding under three broad themes which are reflective of the key challenges and opportunities facing rural Ireland. Rural areas are defined as parts of Ireland outside the city boundaries of Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. Each theme is given further definition through a number of sub-themes, listed on the previous page, which reflect the key areas that require the most support and have the greatest potential.

Rates of Funding

Depending on the nature of the project and the applicant type, different rates of funding apply.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT FUNDING CEILINGS & SUPPORT RATES			
TYPE OF PROJECT	APPLICANT	MAXIMUM RATE OF AID	MAXIMUM FUNDING
Community Projects <u>not</u> involving Economic Activity	Community	Up to a maximum of 75%	€500,000
Community Projects involving Economic Activity	Community	Up to a maximum of 75%	€200,000
Investment & other supports (including promotion undertaken as part of the implementation of a project)	Private	Up to a maximum of 75%	€200,000
	Community	Up to a maximum of 75%	
	Community under accessible services sub-theme targeted at hard to reach communities	Up to a maximum of 90%	
Analysis and Development	Private	Up to a maximum of 90%	€30,000
	Community	Up to a maximum of 90%	
Training	Private or Community	Up to a maximum of 100%	€200,000



More funding information can be found in the 2023 – 2027 LEADER Programme Operating Rules on the DRCD website (www.gov.ie/LEADER). Scan the **QR code** at the bottom of this page.

Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners (IPs)

Decisions on LEADER funding applications are made at a local level by a network of Local Action Groups (LAGs). The LAG approves applications that fundamentally align with the objectives of their Local Development Strategy which has been developed in consultation with local communities.

LAG membership comprises public and private partners from the economic, social, cultural and environmental sectors.

- In each LAG area, Local Development Companies are responsible for the day to day management and co-ordination of the LEADER Programme, either as Implementing Partners (IPs) in a wider LAG or acting as the LAG itself. Applications for LEADER funding are made to these Local Development Companies.
- Rural Development Officers within your nearest Local Development Company are the first port of call when thinking about applying for LEADER funding. For more details on your LAG and IP (where applicable), consult the LEADER section of the DRCD website (www.gov.ie/LEADER) by scanning the **QR code** below:



Targeted and Rolling Calls

LAGs may operate a ‘rolling call’ (‘first-come, first served’) for LEADER funding applications and accept submissions on an ongoing basis. Additionally, targeted (‘competitive’) calls allow LAGs to concentrate funding in specific strategic areas of need or opportunity. LAGs must undertake at least one targeted call in each year from 2024 – 2027.

Applying For LEADER Funding

Step 1 | Expression of Interest

Step 2 | Full Application

Step 3 | Evaluation and Funding Decision

Step 4 | Implementation

Step 5 | Completion and Grant Payment

Step 1: Expression of Interest

Opportunity to outline project proposal and acts as a precursor to full application.

Funding applicants must submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) before formally applying for LEADER. This process allows for initial engagement with the applicant on the details of the project. Applicants may be required to submit an EOI application form themselves (using a standardised template) or alternatively the LAG will directly input details of the potential project to the LEADER IT system.



Before proceeding to the full application stage, staff members in the LAG or IP are responsible for assessing the eligibility of the applicant and project based on a range of criteria.

This includes the project's compliance with the Local Development Strategy; the project's alignment with a relevant LEADER programme theme; evidence of matching funding; and capacity to deliver the project.

Step 2: Full Application

Application prepared and submitted with supporting documentation.

LAGs utilise the same standardised application form. This seeks information pertaining to the applicant and project, such as the main activities, timelines involved, expected impacts, budgetary requirements, and plans to promote the project.

Budget and Procurement

A budget must be provided based, for example, on quotes obtained from potential suppliers. If the project is also supported through other funding sources, these must be evidenced. Previous public funding support must also be disclosed. Carrying out a procurement process is required. LAGs may offer the option of gaining provisional approval before procurement is completed.

- Those awarded total funding of more than 50% of project costs (from LEADER and public matching funds), must follow National Public Procurement rules. Guidelines are available which set out requirements and spend thresholds on how supplies and services must be purchased, such as the number of quotations to obtain and if an open public tendering process is required.
- Those awarded total funding of 50% or less of project costs (from LEADER and public matching funds), are not required to follow the National Procurement Guidelines and instead can follow the LEADER Specific Tendering Thresholds.



Supporting Documentation

A range of supporting documentation must also be included with an application. For example, accounts for three years and bank statements (three months minimum) for all accounts held are required. Depending on the applicant, different types of accounts are acceptable.

- Audited accounts are required for an existing business;
- Income & expenditure accounts are required for community/voluntary groups;
- For applicants who are not companies, unaudited sole trader/partnership accounts are acceptable; and
- Unaudited accounts signed off by the project promoter and/or his agent are acceptable for companies not obliged to carry out an audit.

Other requirements may be needed such as a business or marketing plan, planning permission and evidence of leasehold. Specific requirements for individual projects can be discussed and determined with Project Officers.

Evidence of Matching Funds and Bridging Finance

The LAG must obtain evidence that the project promoter has the necessary matching funding. This can come from private funds or, for community applicants, it could also be other public funds. Public funding must be in the form of a cash contribution. Contributions-in-kind (e.g. voluntary labour) can be used as match funding but cannot constitute the full amount. It also must be confirmed that match funding is not from other EU funds. A minimum cash contribution of 5% is also required from community groups.

In addition, the LAG must ensure that the project promoter has adequate resources (or bridging finance) in place to deliver the project. Bridging finance can be sourced through lending organisations such as Clann Credo, Community Finance Ireland, Micro Finance Ireland or Credit Unions.



Step 3: Evaluation and Funding Decision

Application assessed by Evaluation Committee and submitted to LAG for consideration. Funding decisions are then made by the LAG.

An independent Evaluation Committee is appointed to evaluate and score each application based on objective criteria and subsequently makes a recommendation to the LAG decision-making members as to the suitability of the project for funding. A project must score a minimum of 65% of the total marks to be considered. Where there is a targeted call for applications, projects should be ranked in order of highest to lowest as per the scoring record and funding distributed according to this ranking.

A detailed record of the Evaluation Committee's assessment and recommendations is maintained on the LEADER IT System document repository. This record must include a clear rationale for each recommendation, as well as the recommended rate of aid, grant ceiling and any conditions the Evaluation Committee recommends should attach to the project. If a project is not approved for funding, applicants are informed of the reasons for this. Decisions can also be appealed.

Once a project is approved by the LAG, a letter of offer or contract, clearly stating the funded activity and items approved for funding, is issued to the applicant. This must be accepted in writing and returned to the LAG within the period prescribed by the LAG in the letter of offer.

Step 4: Implementation

Funding contract accepted by applicant and project can commence.

Once the applicant accepts the contract they can proceed to implement their project in line with its terms and conditions. LEADER funding recipients must comply with information and publicity requirements, such as including relevant logos (e.g. Government of Ireland Project Ireland 2040; Our Rural Future; European Union emblem) on project materials (e.g. publications, website etc.) as relevant.



Step 5: Completion and Grant Payment

Applicant submits funding claim, along with supporting documentation, and grant is paid.

When the project is complete, the applicant submits a claim form to the IP with the required supporting documentation such as relevant invoices and bank statements. Depending on the project, the supporting documents needed will differ.

A Project Officer may carry out a site visit to verify the project is complete. A grant payment claim is then made by the LAG to the DRCD. Once the funds are paid to the LAG, the grant is paid by electronic fund transfer to the applicant's designated account as soon as possible. Applicants can also request phased payments (of five or less) but must exceed €1,000 and at least 20% of eligible costs must have been incurred.

More Information:

**Department of Rural and
Community Development**

<http://www.gov.ie/drcd>

EU Commission

https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development_en



CAP Network Ireland

CAP Network Ireland is a membership network for farmers, advisors, researchers, rural communities, agencies and other interested stakeholders. The Network is dedicated to supporting sustainable agriculture, rural development and innovation across Ireland. We provide up-to-date information, case studies, publications and events to maximise the beneficial outcomes of Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plan 2023-2027 for rural stakeholders on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).

Network Partners



Join the Network

CAP Network Ireland membership is free and open to anyone interested in becoming more actively involved in rural innovation and sustainable agricultural development in Ireland. Members will:

- Receive up-to-date information from a source you can trust.
- Have access to the latest insights related to CAP funding, training and networking opportunities in Ireland.
- Be part of a growing national network of stakeholders working in sustainable agriculture and innovation.

More Information:



