



Wicklow
Rural Partnership Limited
Promoting Integrated Rural Development

Ref: JAN 04

LEADER + Funding Guidelines

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

WICKLOW RURAL PARTNERSHIP LTD

Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd (W.R.P.) is responsible for the implementation of the LEADER + and National Rural Development Programmes in County Wicklow, (excluding Bray, Rathmichael and part of Kilmacanogue), until 2006. W.R.P. was established in September 1994, for the purpose of administering the LEADER II Programme having evolved from Wicklow Rural Enterprise Limited, which was established in 1992 to deliver the LEADER I Programme in County Wicklow.

WRP has a Board of Directors which is comprised of members from:

- Local Community Groups
- I.F.A.
- Teagasc
- Foróige
- Macra na Feirme
- I.C.A.
- Wicklow County Enterprise Board
- Agri-business sector
- Glanbia
- County Wicklow V.E.C.
- Wicklow County Tourism
- Wicklow County Council
- FÁS
- Credit Union
- Dúchas
- Business sector

LEADER + Programme

LEADER + is an EU programme aimed at promoting the long-term sustainable development of rural areas. The theme for LEADER + selected by Wicklow Rural Partnership in consultation with local development stakeholders is "to support integrated communities and sustainable local environments and economies through enhancing quality of life and promoting sustainable development".

- The emphasis of LEADER + is on innovation including an innovative approach to development in the local context in terms of method, product (including services and community based or private promoter projects), production process or market.
- Women and youth in rural areas, are two groups, which have been identified for priority attention under the programme.

ACTIVITIES QUALIFYING FOR ASSISTANCE

1. **Training**
2. **Analysis & Development**
3. **Innovative Rural Enterprise, Craft Enterprise & Local Service/Facilities**
4. **Exploitation of Agriculture, Forestry, & Fisheries Products**
5. **Enhancement of Natural/Built/Social/Cultural Environment**
6. **Environmentally Friendly Initiatives**
7. **Rural/Agri-Tourism**
 - (a) Product Development/Leisure Recreational Facilities
 - (b) Accommodation (inc. Restoration of Farm Buildings)
 - (c) Tourism Marketing, Promotion & Training

1. Training

The cost of training for community groups may be funded at rates of up to 100%.

The training measure includes support for:

- Provision of relevant training generally.
- Provision of general/specialised training courses in fixed/mobile facilities and in-house development of appropriate training facilities.
- Provision of flexible learning opportunities in new technology, for women and young people in particular.

Only actual costs are eligible for funding (tuition, materials etc.),

Participants may not be paid for their attendance at training nor may they be reimbursed for any personal costs involved e.g. travel, time off work, etc.

Where a group considers it is necessary to provide for childcare for participants, they should seek the prior written approval of the Department.

Training under LEADER+ should target in particular the needs of promoters of projects seeking LEADER + aid.

Existing training courses and funding should be availed of. LEADER + funding should only be drawn on when specially commissioned training is required to meet identified new needs.

Where a group charges a fee for training (even if only for refreshments), the amount of all fees must be deducted from the overall cost to arrive at the eligible expenditure.

Funding of Primary Degrees or Masters Degrees/Courses is ineligible as to support such is duplicating the efforts of other mainstream educational supports.

Courses in Community & Rural Development:

A two-year course leading to a Diploma in Rural Development may be offered through distance learning through the five colleges-UCD, UCC, UCG, Tipperary Institute and St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Other appropriate courses may also be considered subject to the prior written approval of the Department.

2. Analysis & Development

Grant aid subject to a limit of €7,500, 50% for private projects, 80% for community based projects.

The measure includes support for:

- Feasibility studies
- Business plans
- Resource audits
- Development of prototype products & services

Grant aid will only be approved where the need is demonstrated and essential.

Where analysis/development is undertaken by a promoter a copy of the report or results of the analysis/development will be provided to avoid duplication/overlap in relation to studies being funded.

3. Innovative Rural Enterprise, Crafts Enterprise & Local Service/Facilities

Grant aid not to exceed €65,000 at a rate of 50%.

The measure includes support for:

- Support, guidance, and the provision of an advisory service.
- Provision of a range of assistance types for start up enterprises.
- Expansion of existing enterprises including the adoption of new technologies.
- Development of innovative products and local services.
- Provision of a range of assistance types for adding value to local products including support for business networks, collective marketing, local branding initiatives, improved quality and development of processing facilities.

The promoter must ensure that:

There is a market for the proposed product or service and that the project will be capable of attaining economic viability.

The project has the capacity 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.

Grant aid will not give rise to deadweight or job displacement elsewhere.

Adequate overall finance will be available to fund the project

He/she possesses sufficient management and technical capacity to implement the proposed project.

4. Exploitation of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Products

Grant aid not to exceed €65,000 at a rate of 50%.

The EU places considerable constraints on the types of project that may be grant aided e.g. conventional agricultural production and practices. All enquiries under this measure must have prior written approval from the Department in advance of application to confirm eligibility.

Small processing units should concentrate on servicing niche markets (e.g. for farmhouse cheeses, yoghurts, fruit preserves including health, and high value up-market brands).

Projects concerned with food processing/manufacturing must indicate how food safety legislation requirements will be met.

Equine projects in general are not eligible, however in exceptional circumstances, equine projects involving a tourism element may be considered, eligibility must be confirmed by the Department.

LEADER + can support horticulture only where the development can be shown to be clearly innovative and it is certain that funding is not available from another source i.e. small-scale horticultural investments, particularly involving new post-harvest product lines.

All project proposals will be assessed to ensure that they comply with 'Good Farming Practice' and environmental requirements.

5. Enhancement of Natural/Built/Social/Cultural Environment

Grant aid not to exceed € 65,000 at a rate of 50%

The measure includes support for:

- Support, guidance and advice.
- Provision of a range of assistance types for enhancement of the natural environment, built environment, cultural environment and social environment.

6. Environmentally Friendly Initiatives

Grant aid not to exceed € 65,000 at a rate of 50%.

This measure includes support for:

- Support, guidance and advice.
- Provision of a range of assistance types for developing alternative/renewable energy enterprises and waste management initiatives using new technologies and know-how.

Activities undertaken must be environmentally friendly.

Consultation will take place with the Office of Public Works (OPW), Dúchas and/or the relevant Local Authority on any projects with environmental, heritage or conservation implications before decisions are taken on the offer of grant aid. The views of the OPW will be incorporated into the conditions of any grant approval.

7. Rural/Agri-Tourism

Objectives of Rural/Agri-Tourism: -

- To develop and enhance the tourism product range in an environmentally and sustainable way so as to increase opportunities for employment and the development of rural areas.
- To promote rural development consistent with the priorities identified in the White Paper for Rural Development and Bord Fáilte Éireann's Tourism Development Strategy 2000 - 2006 and Regional Initiatives such as the Western Development Commission's "Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West".

Support will be available for the following:

(a) Product Development / Leisure Recreational Facilities

Grant aid not to exceed €65,000 at a rate of 50%.

Aid will be available to upgrade and expand existing leisure/recreational facilities, visitor attractions and develop new facilities on a selective basis e.g.

- Cycling Routes
- Trail Riding
- Green Routes
- Health Tourism
- Disabled Visitor Facilities including accommodation

Other Products: tourism developments consistent with Regional & National policies may be supported including water based activities, other recreational/leisure facilities, and family orientated facilities/activities where a promoter can identify a specific need and establish that a market is available.

In particular, grant aid will be made available where there are coherent and marketable clusters of existing tourism products.

Priority in awarding grant aid will be given for the upgrading /expansion of existing facilities.

All capital investment projects must provide for costs associated with appropriate landscaping.

(b) Accommodation

Grant aid not to exceed €40,000 at a rate of 30%.

Accommodation shall include:

- Self Catering
- Holiday Hostels
- Caravan & Camping Parks

All accommodation grants aided must meet the approved standards of the National Bodies approving the respective categories of accommodation.

Support for the upgrading /expansion of existing accommodation will be given priority.

New accommodation may be supported (on a highly selective basis) to cater for special interest products in specific areas within a cluster of attractions.

Grant aid will be only available for accommodation (new or upgraded) where approved leisure facilities/activities are in place, or are being put in place, or are already available in the locality.

Restoration of Farm Buildings

Grant aid for the restoration of traditional farm buildings (including farmhouses no longer in use as domestic residences) as self-catering accommodation will be available at a rate of 40% of eligible expenditure subject to a maximum grant of €40,000.

(c) Tourism Marketing, Promotion & Training

Grant Aid will be available at a rate of 50% of eligible expenditure subject to a maximum grant of €10,000 for individual initiatives and €40,000 in respect of group/co-operative initiatives over the period of the programme to 2006.

Eligible activities under marketing will include:

- Advertising – priority will be given to co-operative advertising.
- Direct Mail.
- Attendance at sales workshops.
- Development of Internet and websites by an amalgamation of community groups or community groups in association with agri-tourism promoters or networking groups.

Marketing groups may comprise of:

- Product/sectoral marketing groups.
- Community/voluntary organisations in association with rural dwellers, including farmers, covering a distinct geographical area.
- Rural/agri-tourism co-operatives/marketing and sales groups.

Aid will also be available for organisations/co-operatives with a central reservation system towards the costs of setting up and networking.

Grant aid is not available in respect of individual applications for print promotional material or for the development of websites.

All marketing initiatives must only be undertaken in co-operation with Mid-East Regional Tourism Authority.

A three-year Marketing Plan must be provided in respect of all applications under the measure.

Training

Grant aid is available to help develop skills of providers/operators through participation in training programmes designed to improve visitor satisfaction with the rural/agri tourism product and may be funded to a maximum of 100%.

GRANT INFORMATION & ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Grant assistance will only be provided to projects and initiatives that conform with the objectives, strategies and policies of Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd.

The provision of financial assistance for capital investment and commercial enterprise development is governed by an agreement between Wicklow Rural Partnership and Wicklow County Enterprise Board.

LEADER + is not intended for major development. Maximum grant aid of €65,000 at a rate of 50% is available, and in exceptional circumstances (one per year) grant aid of up to €100,000 by prior approval of the Department.

Application Procedure

The promoter meets with an officer from WRP to discuss the proposed project/idea (If your project is not eligible for aid under LEADER +, WRP will offer guidance on other grant agencies that may be able to give assistance).

1. The promoter completes an application form and prepares a Business Plan.
2. The promoter may then meet again with an officer from WRP.
3. The application is then assessed by the Evaluation Committee of WRP who will make a recommendation to the Board. (On occasion the Committee may defer the application for further information).
4. The WRP Board will decide to approve or refuse funding for the project.
5. Following approval a detailed letter of offer and contract is issued to the promoter. A formal acceptance should be signed and returned within 14 days to WRP.
6. There will be an expiry date on all contracts issued by WRP.
7. There will be site visits by members of WRP, Department of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development Inspectors & outside experts.
8. Grant payment is made on completion of the project and the submission of valid documents and claims inspected by WRP.
9. The cost of an independent qualified assessor with no interest or connection with the project is borne by the promoter prior to payment of grant.

Activities Excluded for Aid under LEADER + Programme

In no circumstances will grant aid be offered or paid in respect of the following:

- Conventional agricultural production and practices
- Conventional motor vehicles
- Conventional retail & distribution service
- If the project has received aid from 'de minimis' sources in excess of €100,000 during three consecutive years prior to application. De Minimis sources of aid include funding received from LEADER II & County Enterprise Board etc.
- If the proposed project is capable of proceeding without LEADER funding (i.e. "deadweight") or will potentially result in the displacement of jobs in a similar enterprise elsewhere in the local area.
- If the proposed project qualifies for funding under another agency, scheme or programme.
- Leasing/Loans
- Mobile equipment is ineligible unless it is an integral part of the project and must have prior written approval from Department. However stringent safeguards must be in place to ensure that equipment is not misappropriated. An asset register must be kept and a place of storage should be designated and available for inspection.
- Normal business expenses (e.g. telephone postage). Other than in the case of Feasibility Studies & Market Research
- Second hand equipment
- The purchase of land or buildings
- Working capital (including stock)
- Reed Beds
- Mainstream Government service areas such as education, health, housing and childcare.
- Greyhounds, Racehorses & Sport-horses
- Mainstream Sports Clubs & Golf Clubs

Private Matching Funds & Voluntary Labour

For the purpose of recording the private match funding element of projects, only costs for which paid invoices and receipts have been submitted for the purpose of drawing down the grant payment will be considered.

Donations

The donation of buildings, equipment or services free of charge or at a nominal cost as part of a project may be reckoned as private matching funds for *community based* projects but only with the prior written approval of the Department.

Donations cannot constitute the full amount of the matching funding, at least 10% of the matching contribution must be in actual expenditure. Any donation is subject to certification by an appropriately qualified third party to be agreed between the Group and the promoter at the promoter's expense.

Local Authority/National Lottery

In Certain circumstances, small-scale works of general benefit to the local community can use Local Authorities and National Lottery as private matching funding. This funding cannot constitute the full amount of matching funding, at least 10% of the matching contribution must be in actual expenditure. Any project with Programme expenditure of over €25,000, matching Local Authority or National Lottery funding should be submitted to the Department for consideration.

Voluntary Labour

Voluntary labour is acceptable in certain circumstances as a source of private matching funds for both capital works and for technical support (e.g. feasibility studies and market research) for *community based* projects only and up to a maximum of 50%. In certain exceptional circumstances, and with the prior written approval of the Department, it may be acceptable for private promoters (up to a limit of 25%).

This facility is subject to the following restrictions and conditions:

(a) The total amount to be claimed by way of direct voluntary labour must be agreed beforehand (i.e. prior to commencement of approved works) by the project promoter with WRP. Any excess over the agreed amount will be ineligible.

(b) WRP may consider claims for grant payments, which include voluntary labour contributions in respect of inputs either by way of actual work, carried out and/or supervision etc. by appropriately qualified persons. In this connection, the agreement entered into beforehand must include the names of the persons contributing the voluntary labour, their relationship to the community promoter, the nature and time quantity of the contribution and the qualifications which enable them to make that contribution i.e. their trade or profession, e.g. engineer, architect, electrician, plumber, etc.

(c) Grant claims for out of pocket expenses and incidental expenditure incurred in the voluntary labour element of a project may only be considered on the basis of vouched receipts and certified claims. WRP may not allow any claims submitted in respect of attendance at meetings or incidental expenses incurred arising from such attendance.

(d) The costs claimed may be allowed subject to certification by an appropriately qualified third party or parties, e.g. Engineer, Quantity Surveyor, Accountant, Auditor, to be agreed between WRP and the promoter at the promoter's expense. In any event, the following limitations will apply to all grant claims for payment which include direct voluntary labour contributions: -

- An hourly rate of €13 per hour
- A daily rate of €114 per day
- A weekly rate of €570 per week

(e) The project promoter must comply with all special and standard conditions attaching to the formal letter of offer issued by the Group in respect of the approved project. For the purpose of calculating the amount of aid for a project, in addition to the normal rules, the Grant must not exceed the amount of actual expenditure on the project i.e. there can be no Grant assistance towards the value of the voluntary labour contribution. Voluntary labour cannot constitute the full amount of matching funding. In the case of community-based projects, at least 10% of the matching contribution must be in actual expenditure. For the exceptional private promoters the figure is 50%.

GRANT DRAWDOWN

- Activity undertaken or work commenced prior to the date of the agreement is not eligible for grant aid.
- An application form or acknowledgement of a submission itself may not be taken as an indication that the application is eligible for or will be awarded grant aid.
- If the project costs prove higher than anticipated an increase in grant aid cannot be given.
- Eligible costs for projects involving capital investment are:
 - construction
 - purchase of new machinery and equipment
 - general costs, such as architects', engineers' and consultants' fees up to a ceiling of 12% of the cost referred to in (a) and (b) above.

Applications for grant assistance should be supported by at least three independent itemised quotations for all work/expenditure over €2,000. This information will form the basis of any grant commitments made.

Grant assistance can only be paid on the successful completion of a project (including assessment and certification) and must be in full accordance with the express conditions of grant approval.

All claims for grant assistance must provide original documentation (paid invoices, cashed cheques, extracts from bank statements, etc). Interim payments on work in progress cannot be facilitated unless by prior approval.

WRP may seek original cheque book/journal, photocopy of cheques and bank statement details of promoters. Only original itemised paid invoices may be accepted by WRP for grant payment.

A limit of €300 will apply for payment in cash, the project promoter provides invoices in support of payments. Amounts in excess of €300 must be paid by cheque or money orders.

Taxation

VAT

The default position for all promoters will be that they are registered for VAT. For VAT to be eligible the promoter will need to prove that they are **not** registered for VAT. The amount of Value Added Tax (VAT) or other taxes that may be recovered by the beneficiary will be excluded from the calculation of the payment of aid to project promoters. The situation relating to the registration of farmers for VAT purposes is set out in the Department's booklet "Schemes and Services in Agriculture 2001". Other beneficiaries of LEADER funding may be registered for VAT.

Tax clearance procedures:

WRP will seek confirmation that the tax affairs of the promoter and contractors directly involved or engaged by beneficiaries (i.e. builders employed in construction work) are in order before payments of grant aid are made.

The following arrangements will apply:

(a) Grant payments up to €6,500

In the case of grant payments up to €6,500, applicants or contractors are required to indicate the tax district dealing with their tax affairs and furnish their tax reference (PPSN/RSI) number and confirm that their tax affairs are in order. In a proportion of such cases (10%), approval of payment of grant will not be given until the numbers are checked for tax compliance with the appropriate tax district.

(b) Grant payments of €6,500 or more

Where grant payments are for €6,500 or more the applicant or contractor is required in each case to furnish a current tax clearance certificate from the Revenue Commissioners. N.B.: As a project promoter be aware, when offered grant aid, of the tax clearance requirements both in relation to yourself and to contractors you intend engaging for your project. In cases where the necessary certificates cannot be produced on completion of work or at the payment stage, payment will be withheld. Where it is found that a group awards less than €6,500 to avoid tax clearance procedures, their contract will be reviewed.

Health & Safety Legislation

Project promoters must comply with the Health & Safety Authority regulations where relevant.

Insurance

In accordance with the Contract Agreement, the promoter is required to effect employee's liability insurance, public liability insurance and insurance against fire damage to buildings, equipment and other facilities. In this regard the Minister and the Department must be indemnified against any claims or losses.

Grant Clawback

WRP will make it a condition of offer of grant aid to the promoter that: -

- if the beneficiary goes into liquidation or receivership within a period of five years of the date of the final grant payment, the grant must be repaid in full.
- if any grant-aided assets are sold, leased or changed within five years of the date of grant payment without the express approval of WRP, the grant must be repaid in full.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Conflict of Interest

Applicants to WRP for aid who are Board Directors, members of Sub Committees or Evaluation Committees and members of Staff should declare their interest to the Department.

Changes to Operating Rules/Guidelines

The Department reserves the right to make additions and amendments to these rules in light of changing circumstances over the course of the programme.

Publicity

Project promoters are required to acknowledge and give prominence to the EU aid for their project. As part of the conditions of grant aid project promoters must facilitate visits to their project by individuals and groups.

Equality

Under equality legislation, it is unlawful to discriminate against persons on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, religion, age, disability, race, colour, language, nationality and national or ethnic orientation, including membership of the travelling community. The legislation makes discrimination unlawful not only in the workplace but also in the provision of goods, facilities and services, including recreational facilities and services. EU regulations also provide that measures financed under Structural Funds should conform to the principle of equal opportunities.

Data Protection Act 1988

All applications will be dealt with in strict confidence. However information recorded may be disclosed to the following:

Dept. of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development	Wicklow County Council
Wicklow County Enterprise Board	Wicklow ADM Groups
Wicklow County Development Board	Enterprise Ireland
MERTA	FÁS
Teagasc	Other State Agencies

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