

Added Value of Networking



Provision of networking activities for advisors & innovation support services:

Story name: Improving the quality of work in LAGs

Basic information	
NRN:	Rural Network Unit of Finland
Keywords:	Developing the quality work of LAGs
Coordinator:	Rural Network Unit of Finland
Partners:	Finnish LAGs and regional authorities
Resources:	140 000 €
Period:	From January 2013 to June 2014

Background to the networking/innovation support activities

There are 56 LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Finland. They play an important role in the attainment of the objectives of the Rural Development Programme for Mainland Finland 2007-2013 and the Rural Development Programme for Åland 2007-2013.

The Rural Network Unit of Finland is offering the LAGs a training package aimed at strengthening the commitment of LAG board members and providing them with assistance and tools. The goal is also to strengthen the LAGs powerful expert role in local development, as well as to bolster communication and trust between regional authorities and LAGs.

The development process helps ensure the vitality, effectiveness and functionality of the LEADER approach.



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Purpose and description of the networking/innovation support activities

The desired outcomes of the training package are:

- The LAGs have compiled a basic manual for quality and leadership;
- The vision for each LAG has been identified and put in writing;
- The processes used by the LAGs have been identified and described, including the decision-making procedure;
- The employee job descriptions have been defined;
- The interface of regional authorities has been addressed (the processes for communication, approval and payments, as well as a development partner).

Who benefited from the activities and how

The largest group to benefit from the training package is that of the 56 LAGs in Mainland Finland and Åland. Through training, the LAGs have the opportunity to assume a more active role as a local rural developer. Benefits for the LAGs include learning how they ensure they consider all the stakeholders, cooperation with different kinds of rural development stakeholders, strengthening their customer service skills, LAG customers in different parts of Finland receive a similar service.

Main results of the networking/innovation support activities & added value of the chosen delivery approach

The six-part training package includes plenty of discussion and requires the participants to conduct their own analyses. The training package requirements also include self-assessment: identification of strengths, i.e. personal best practices; improvement insights, i.e. what practices or processes are lacking from the existing activities; and development ideas, i.e. insights into what the LAG should do.

Success factors

Before the process began the participants were given preliminary tasks. The results will be jointly processed later on by the LAGs, the consultant and the representatives of the regional authorities.

The training package utilises a six-phase workshop-based working method. The model in its whole is transferable to other Rural Networks as well. It is essential for the success of the training package to have various rural development actors and LAG stakeholders involved in the process. One of the key factors for the successful implementation of the training package is to have members of LEADER Local Action Groups take part in the steering group for the training package. They have also been able to influence the contents of the training package themselves.

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Description of NSU and other partners contribution

The Rural Network Unit of Finland selected an external expert body through a tender process to provide assistance to the LAGs and regional authorities, tasked with introducing the participants to quality work, encouraging and aiding them throughout the process, and making sure the process stays on schedule.

Ramboll Management Consulting was selected to perform the follow-up and practical coordination of the training package. Together with the Rural Network Unit the consulting company acts in cooperation with all 15 regional contact people as the responsible event organiser and activator. They are also in charge of the planning, coordination, gathering and reporting of results related to all 15 regional quality work processes.

The Rural Network Unit of Finland is present at the training sessions, monitors the successful implementation of the training package around Finland, and leads the steering group work for the training package.

Last Update

November 2013



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