

LEADER in Finland

Multi-step LAG Selection Procedure

A. Background information: What is the scope of the approach – and why was it put in place.

1. What are the **needs or the issues** that justified the adoption of this approach/solution? (for instance: reduction of administrative burdens, encouraging participation of stakeholders, tackling specific concerns, improving coordination between policy actions, etc.)

The LDS and LAG selection procedure is a multi-step exercise in Finland.

- ✓ This enables MA to give feedback and help improve the quality of LDS throughout the strategy design and approval process.
- ✓ It also helps the LAGs to ensure that the targets set are realistic in relation to the resources available, with measurable indicators.
- ✓ LDS preparation before the national Rural Development Programme approval speeds up the operational launch of a new programming period.



B. Description of the approach: how it was done in practice

2. What does the approach/practice **consist in and how** it is implemented (including procedural aspects, if relevant)? Who are the main actors involved in the implementation?

The Finnish MA sets mandatory and qualitative selection criteria for the LAGs. They are related to the LAG as a legal organisation as well as with the seven specific features of LEADER and the quality of the LDS.

- i. During the first step of the LAG assessment, the Finnish MA evaluates the qualitative aspects of the LDS. Namely:
 1. Bottom-up approach
 2. Innovative approach
 3. Multi-sector integration
 4. Equity and sustainability
 5. Cooperation and complementarity
 6. Realistic budgeting
 7. Municipal commitment and co-financing
- ii. The second step of the approval procedure consists of written feedback to the LAGs thus enabling them to further develop those parts of the LDS that were considered inadequate or only average in quality. The LAGs are given enough time to make the necessary corrections in reality and not only on paper (months rather than weeks).
- iii. The third step is the formal approval of the LAG and its LDS, still allowing feedback to the LAG and final updates of the LDS. At this stage, the public funds are allocated to each of the approved LAGs. If the funding is considerably less than a LAG's request, a LAG has a chance to adapt its targets to the available budget.

In Finland the time frames for the three steps when preparing the programming period 2007-13 were as follows:

- STEP 1:** Opening the call of tenders on 4th November and receiving the LDS proposals by 15th December 2005, beginning the evaluation process. The existing LAGs were informed about the procedure in advance during the Spring 2005 so they had almost a full year to prepare their LDSs.
- STEP 2:** Giving written feedback to LAGs in May 2006. LAGs are asked to submit their revised LDSs by the end of September 2006.
- STEP 3:** Formal approval of the LAGs and their LDSs in August 2007 by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry – immediately after the European Commission formal approval of the Finnish National Rural Development Programme.



3. Are there **communication aspects** involved in its implementation (to beneficiaries, the public or other stakeholders)?

In step one, the MA organises a public call for tenders, with the mandatory and qualitative selection criteria. Any organisation meeting these criteria may submit its LDS proposal. The criteria, LEADER method and strategic planning are also explained in several national and regional training sessions targeted at the practitioners. During the second and third steps the MA communicates individually with those LAGs that successfully passed the first step.

C. Conclusions/lessons learnt relevant for the future: what were the results

4. What kind of **benefits / improvements** the practice is expected to generate (or that have been observed)?

- ✓ Compared to a one-step LAG selection procedure, where LAGs are either approved or disqualified at once, the multi-step LAG selection procedure produces better quality LDSs and better trained and motivated key actors in the LAGs.
- ✓ The issues that the Finnish MA managed to improve in the LDSs in 2006-07 included the targeting and indicators, budgeting, equity issues, communication plans and the LAG Board structure.
- ✓ Finland was the first Member State to approve its LAGs and they were made operational in August 2007.
- ✓ The multi-step LAG selection procedure also allows interaction and the building of mutual trust and understanding between the LAGs and the MA. It gives persons' names and faces to both organisations – relationships that are crucially important during the later LDS implementation phase.

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5. Has the approach produced **additional burdens** (in particular, administrative burdens) for its implementation? In case, how they have been overcome (or will be)?

The multi-step LAG selection procedure requires more resources from the MA than a one-step process. However it pays back in the higher quality and more structured LDSs.

The Finnish MA was also able to use external evaluators in the process, which helped the staff duties and made dealing with 55 LAGs possible at the same time.

6. What are the **“lessons learnt”**? Are they relevant in the view of the future policy framework and the possibilities offered by the next generation of RDPs as outlined in the legislative proposals for 2014-2020?

- The multi-step LAG selection procedure has increased the quality and efficiency of LDSs in Finland.
- It can also be an effective training and capacity building mechanism, if more Member States are aiming to cover their full rural territory with LEADER during the 2014-2020.
- The weakest areas can also be offered extra training sessions during the second and third step of the selection procedure.
- As major delays in approving and operationally launching the LAGs have been a significant problem in many Member States in 2007-13, quick and effective start-up allowed by the multi-step selection procedure should be warmly welcomed in 2014-2020.



Preparation of Leader for the programming period 2007-2013

Timetable

