

Better LEADER practices for Local Development Strategies across the EU

This Infosheet is part of a series of relevant practice examples that Managing Authorities and Local Action Groups have used while implementing the LEADER approach in the 2007-2013 period. The series aims to extend the reach of rural development policy by highlighting what works well in the design and delivery phase of Local Development Strategies (LDS).

Inter-LAG evaluation process

N.07



Country, Region: Finland, Southern Finland

Organisation: Päijänne-LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) and Pohjois-Kymen Kasvu LAG

AT A GLANCE



Objectives

An inter-LAG evaluation system was put in place by two neighbouring Local Action Groups (LAGs), Päijänne-LEADER and Pohjois-Kymen Kasvu. The objective was to improve the LAG evaluation process and to share best practices.



Key elements of the approach

The key aspect of this approach is that the managers of two neighbouring LAGs agreed to carry out a peer-to-peer, inter-LAG evaluation combining some of the features of self- and external-evaluation. The LAG managers exchanged territories and carried out a targeted mid-term evaluation of the neighbouring LAG.



Lessons learnt

Getting LAGs to work together on their quality management systems has proven to be most beneficial. Instead of having external evaluators with limited understanding of the work that LAGs do, LEADER practitioners from other LAGs provided objective and workable feedback to help further develop the LAG's impact. This peer-to-peer evaluation method can enhance the usefulness and quality of the evaluation process for LAGs.



Objectives and background

The development work environment in Local Action Groups is quite distinctive and can often be difficult and laborious to understand for an external evaluator.

Two neighbouring LAGs in Southern Finland were frustrated by what they considered to be poor quality external

evaluations of their work; namely evaluations that didn't provide concrete tools to further develop LAG performance. They therefore joined forces to carry out a peer-to-peer, inter-LAG evaluation combining some features of self-evaluation and external evaluation.



Key elements of the approach

The Päijänne-LEADER LAG and Pohjois-Kymen Kasvu LAG managers, as the most knowledgeable experts about their LAGs' work, suggested to their respective Boards of Directors that they exchange territories and themselves carry out a targeted mid-term evaluation. It was also felt that project owners were more likely to give honest and objective feedback about the role of the LAG to someone external to their LAG. Both Boards approved the suggestion.

In practice, the LAG managers' interviewed about half of each other's project owners using evaluation questionnaires that were developed

together. The main points to be checked were the quality of the LAG's services, the results of the LAG projects and the relationship and cooperation with the regional Managing Authority office.

The LAG managers visited some 10 projects and interviewed by phone some 20 projects. Project owners received the questionnaires beforehand so they knew what topics to discuss.

After the data collection the "borrowed" managers analysed the results and drew conclusions and recommendations. These were presented to the neighbouring LAG Board by the manager at the final stage of the process.

Communication aspects

The inter-LAG evaluation requires strong mutual trust between the LAGs and the staff members involved. From the project point of view, the project holders' communication with an unfamiliar, neighbouring LAG manager during the evaluation process is easier and more honest than with their 'own' manager.

Reporting the conclusions and recommendations is a sensitive task.



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Lessons learnt

Benefits

For both LAGs involved the inter-LAG evaluation process it was the best learning experience they had during the whole programming period. Fellow LAG managers knew precisely what to look for and which things were relevant from the LAG and Local Development Strategy (LDS) points-of-view. The resulting recommendations were concrete and applicable.

The learning experience was not only fuelled by the evaluation results themselves, but also by the opportunity to look closely into another LAG's processes, find new perspectives and exchange good practices.

The inter-LAG evaluation process didn't require extra staff resources: the same time that would have been spent on self-evaluation was now spent on evaluating the neighbouring LAG. As a matter of fact, the process saved the costs of using an external expert for both LAGs.

The information included in this Infosheet is primarily coming from case studies carried out within the ENRD Focus Group 4 on Better Local Development Strategies. It has been compiled by the Contact Point on the basis of the information collected in the EU Member States and regions and takes into account views expressed by the Focus Group. This notwithstanding, the content does not necessarily reflect the official position of the EU institutions and national authorities.



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Lessons learnt

The next programming period will be the fifth for the LEADER approach. A wealth of knowledge on local development has accumulated over the 20-year history of the methodology. In addition to this peer-to-peer evaluation example, more LAG interaction should be promoted, not only project based but also process based, domestic as well as transnational. Especially fruitful would be exchanges between more experienced and less experienced LAGs, and low-performing and high-performing regions. The national and European rural networks play a crucial facilitation role here.