

ENRD LEADER Cooperation Practitioner-Led Working Group

Proposals and summary < April 2017 >

Final version

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Introduction

The LEADER Cooperation Practitioner-Led Working Group (PWG) has members representing Managing Authorities, NRNs/NSUs, LAGs, and Paying Agencies from 20 EU MS (Austria, BE (Flanders), Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, UK (Scotland, Northern Ireland)), 4 local and international stakeholder organisations, DG AGRI, the ENRD CP and FARNET.

The work of the PWG was launched on 14 October 2016 with the following topics based on suggestions from the Steering Group members of the LEADER Cooperation PWG and LAG suggestions for topics received from LINC2016.

1. The „ideal process-procedure” for a TNC project
2. Developing a common template (cooperation agreements, application forms)
3. „Voluntary agreements”
4. Coordinating the timing of selection and approvals of TNC projects
5. Exploring ways in which NRNs can contribute to „harmonisation” of procedures
6. Developing an EU calendar of TNC calls for projects
7. Common definitions (?) – joint action, common cost
8. Demonstrating the „added value” of cooperation / learning from mistakes
9. The „LEAD MA/PA” concept

Since its launch, PWG members have added three new topics to the online discussion forum. These are:

10. TNC projects outside LEADER (Measure 16)
11. Coordination with EMMF (FLAGs)
12. Preparatory support for TNC projects

This document presents proposals and good practice examples based on the work of the ENRD LEADER Cooperation PWG.

The proposals and good practice examples can be considered for presentation as possible updates to existing guidance on inter-territorial and transnational cooperation.

The proposals and good practice examples presented in this document draw on the PWG member contributions to the following PWG themes:

- ✓ The “ideal process-procedure” for a TNC project
- ✓ Developing a common template (cooperation agreement, application form)
- ✓ Exploring ways in which NRNs can contribute to the “harmonisation” of procedures
- ✓ Common definitions – joint action, common cost
- ✓ Demonstrating the “added value” of cooperation / learning from mistakes
- ✓ The “LEAD MA/PA” concept¹

The final draft of proposals has been presented at the ENRD LEADER Sub-Group meeting (February 2017). The possible linkage between the PWG themes and the relevant sections of the ‘DG AGRI Guide’ are presented in the table below.

The proposals developed on the basis of contributions from PWG members to each theme are presented below.

Proposals

The “ideal process-procedure” for a TNC project

The following table provides a list of some ‘elements’ of an ‘ideal’ TNC framework. The short description of the ‘element’ is followed by an explanation of its rationale.

¹ Short outline presented among the good practice ‘Examples’ section of the document.

ENRD tools that relate to some of these “ideal” elements in terms of facilitating exchange of information about different approaches include:

- The LEADER Cooperation Fact Sheets (http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-cooperation_en) – prepared by the ENRD CP – can facilitate this information sharing.
- The LEADER Cooperation Partner Search template / LEADER Cooperation Partner Search offers (http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/partner-search_en)

<i>Element of “ideal” TNC framework</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
<p>LEADER Cooperation projects are considered as ‘standard’ LDS projects with an added territorial dimension, benefitting all of the participating partners. LEADER cooperation projects are similar to local projects in the sense that they contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the relevant local development strategy. However, due to the added element of a cooperation partner external to the Local Action Group territory, LEADER cooperation projects also have additional benefits related to mutual learning and achieving critical mass in terms of relevant knowledge, experience, methods applied, and other resources.</p>	<p>This definition facilitates the recognition of the added value of cooperation and strengthens the link between the development of the LAG territory and the relevant actions of each local development strategy and the role a cooperation project can play in it.</p>
<p>Networking activities among local action groups prior to the start of a preparatory project using preparatory support are facilitated and supported by National/Regional Rural Networks. Such support by NRNs can include peer-to-peer meetings, cooperation events, guidance material, databases and partner search tools.</p>	<p>National/regional rural networks can provide support through information exchange with other networks and through the ENRD, as well as through small funds to support participation at events and meetings. This phase of support can precede the launching of preparatory actions by LAGs that wish to explore the feasibility of working together in the framework of a cooperation project (or develop such a project using preparatory support). Successful cooperation projects have emerged through this kind of support.</p>
<p>Local Action Groups are allocated a budget for preparatory actions and cooperation projects. Cooperation is integrated into the Local Development Strategies.</p>	<p>This helps LAGs ‘think early’ and plan their cooperation actions as well as the relevant preparatory actions to explore the feasibility of cooperation ideas and prepare their implementation if considered feasible. Moreover, in this way the cooperation themes can be strongly linked to local strategies and thematic objectives of each local programme, avoiding participation in irrelevant schemes.</p>
<p>Local Action Groups select cooperation projects.</p>	<p>LAGs are ‘best placed’ to select the cooperation projects that benefit their territories/stakeholders most. The final eligibility check and issuing the decision on granting the aid is the responsibility of the relevant RDP authority, as in the case of other local projects. These tasks can also be delegated to LAGs, if decided by the Managing Authority.</p>

Element of “ideal” TNC framework

Rationale

Information sharing about relevant procedures and rules at EU Member State level (among regional Managing Authorities) and at EU level (among Member State authorities) and the dissemination of this information towards LAGs.

This helps LAGs and Managing Authorities in the identification of differences in rules and procedures applicable to TNC/inter-territorial cooperation in the relevant partners’ territories. This can also be the basis for a list/database of documents that each MA requires for the approval of a cooperation project in order to avoid delays and explanations by LAGs.

The use of preparatory support should be based on the LAG clearly demonstrating its intention to develop a concrete project, however, the result of the ‘exploratory/preparatory actions’ may be that the LAG decides not to go ahead with a project. A LAG using preparatory support is not ‘required’ to implement a TNC project, if justified

Preparatory support can be used to explore the feasibility of a particular cooperation idea with potential partners and consider the resources available to them (e.g. rates and maximum amounts of support, support from local stakeholders, other sources, etc.). Such ‘exploratory’ action can have two legitimate outcomes which imply that a full cooperation project will not be developed. It either produces some outputs which ‘eliminates’ the need to develop a full cooperation project, or the outcome is that the planned project is not feasible under ‘current’ conditions, so the partners decide not to go ahead to develop the project.

There is no restriction on the number of preparatory actions that a LAG implements within a certain budget threshold for preparatory actions allocated per LAG.

Preparatory support enables potential partners to meet, develop a project application and a memorandum of understanding or cooperation agreement as preparation of the cooperation project.

If eligible actions and costs related to preparatory support enable potential partners to cover a broad range of activities, this facilitates better preparation of the cooperation project and reduces risk of failure. It is essential that potential partners can also visit each other to familiarise with the conditions ‘driving’ their partners’ motivation and interest to enter the specific cooperation project.

Study visits and ‘face-to-face’ meetings with potential partners should be eligible for support as part of preparatory actions.

The appropriate definition of cooperation project objectives and outputs, to be agreed by cooperation partners, also takes account of the different levels of development of the cooperating territories.

This enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of the cooperation project and helps to maximise the outputs for each cooperating partner ‘tailored’ to their specific development needs (including a capacity building element for the project).

Cooperation projects should enable not only LAGs, but other local stakeholders to participate (e.g. “business-to-business” cooperation).²

This maximises the added value of cooperation in terms of development needs of local stakeholders within the LAG territories (e.g. a cooperation project can be ‘driven’ by the capacity-building needs of certain private or public stakeholder groups having a strategic significance to local development).

² For instance, in Germany, the project holder can also be the cooperation partner (non-LAG) if the LAG ‘signs off’ on the cooperation agreement. In Northern Ireland, local stakeholders can be part of cooperation projects as ‘associate’ partners.

Element of “ideal” TNC framework

Rationale

The submission of cooperation project applications for support to the relevant authorities is coordinated among the cooperating partners.

This facilitates a coordinated ‘launch’ of project activities within maximum four months of the submission of project applications (Article 44 of Regulation 1305/2013 (EAFRD Regulation)).

The approval of TNC projects by relevant authorities is coordinated.

Information exchange among Managing Authorities taking part in the approval process can accelerate the approval process and lead to better and more timely decisions.

Developing a common template (cooperation agreement, application form)

The proposals put forward within this theme include:

[A common project information sheet template developed in Spain by the National Rural Network](#) (NRN) that LAGs can use to notify the NRN about the start of the development of a cooperation project. This is also intended as a first step of a coordination process between the regional Managing Authorities involved – supported by the NRN in Spain. This is one step in the “Procedure for Interterritorial Cooperation Projects” being developed. The main steps described in the guidance will be described in 4 annexes as follows:

- Annex I: Common application form with all the information about the project (to present with the agreement)
- Annex II: Common agreement between the partners
- Annex III: statement of intent in which the LAGs declare their intention of preparing a cooperation project and can apply for preparatory support. The submission of the statement of intent notifies the NRN and the MAs of the LAG’s intention to prepare a cooperation project. The NRN gives the Coordinator LAG the information about the approval or not of every MA, dates of calls, etc.
- Annex IV: Common costs

[A generic draft template for a cooperation agreement](#) between local action groups with descriptions of the key elements of the agreement.

Common project information sheet

1. Basic information
1.1 Title of the project
1.2 Theme of the project
1.3 Project objectives and relevant focus area
1.4 Relationship between relevant local development strategy/strategies and project objectives (for each project partner)
1.5 Planned actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint actions • To be developed by each participating LAG (local actions) • Joint actions that are separately invoiced
1.6 Key indicators
1.7 Total cost of the Project (approximate Budget) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.7.1 Total budget <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common costs • own costs for each group 1.7.2 Co-financing EAFRD

1.7.3 Private Contribution (if any)		
1.7.4 Procedure and percentage sharing common expenses		
1.7 Period of implementation		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • For each participating LAG 		
1.8 Description of contacts and meetings between LAGs, prior to the execution of the project		
2. IDENTIFICATION OF PARTNERS		
2.1 LAG 1		
2.1.1	Name	
2.1.2	Coordinating LAG?	YES NO
2.1.3	Contact & legal representative	
2.1.4	Languages spoken (for TNC)	
2.2 LAG 2		
2.2.1	Name	
2.2.2	Coordinating LAG?	YES NO
2.2.3	Contact	
2.2.4	Languages spoken (for TNC)	
2.3 LAG 3 ...		

Generic example for a cooperation agreement for LEADER Trans-national cooperation projects (Draft template)

Article 1

Objective of the TNC project

- *Includes the name of the organisations signing the cooperation agreement and indication whether the partner is a LAG or a group of local public and private partners in a rural territory that is implementing a local development strategy within or outside the Union or a group of local public and private partners in a non-rural territory that is implementing a local development strategy, and expresses their common commitment to implement the project „X” in partnership in accordance with the detailed schedule of activities and budget breakdown (in the annex of the agreement – an integral part of the agreement),*

Article 2

Working languages

- *As agreed by the cooperation project partners (usually English, or another main language of the EU – FR, DE, ES, etc.)*

Article 3

General clauses relating to entry into force, duration, closure and place of implementation

- *The clause on entry into force of the agreement (from the date of approval of the project and notification thereof by at least two Managing Authorities – or other national/regional authorities responsible for TNC project approval) relevant to the territories in which the cooperation partners operate*
- *The maximum duration/time frame of the agreement which can start from the planned dates when project partners submit their respective project proposals in relation to the TNC project to the relevant national/regional authorities and finish when the final payment request related to the TNC project is approved by the relevant national/regional authority*

- *Planned continuance of cooperation activities after the project is closed (if relevant and planned)*
- *The locations/territories where project activities will be implemented e.g. the territories of the respective local action groups (cooperation partners) in accordance with the schedule of activities in the Annex*

Article 4

Obligations, responsibilities, liability

- *A statement that the cooperation partners verify and approve of the information contained in the Annex re the project activity schedule and budget breakdown*
- *The obligations and responsibilities of the lead/coordinating partner – name of organisation included (e.g. financial coordination, coordination of joint actions within the project, monitoring and follow-up activities, continuous communication and liaising with project partners, reporting)*
- *The obligations and responsibilities of the cooperating partners (e.g. using the commonly agreed project activity schedule and objectives in their respective project applications to the relevant LAG/Managing Authority in their territories, ensuring the funding for their share of the common costs of the project and respective – joint and local - actions, reporting to the project partners and lead/coordinating partner, communication and liaising with project partners and the lead/coordinating partner, communicating the project and its outcomes to the general public and other stakeholders, monitoring, provision of relevant document required for project approval)*
- *Limited liability of any cooperation partner in case of force majeure*
- *Limited liability of other project partners due to any damages and costs resulting from the non-compliance of any of the cooperation partners*

Article 5

Changes in the partnership

- *By written amendment agreed and signed by all of the cooperation partners*
- *Two main scenarios should be described: extending the partnership – new cooperation partner(s) enter(s); one (or more) cooperation partner(s) leave(s) the partnership*
- *Modification of the budget – especially relating to common costs and its division among partners – part of the modification both in case of ‘extending’ the partnership and in case of any of the partners leaving the partnership*
- *Obligations of each partner to notify relevant authorities of the change*

Article 6

Project management

- *Project management committee with members from each participating LAG and chaired by the lead/coordinating partner and its responsibilities and tasks*
- *Secretariat of the project management committee provided by the lead/coordinating partner*
- *At least ‘X’ number of meetings within the duration of the project based on written invitation by the lead/coordinating partner*

Article 7

Dispute resolution, applicable law

- *First and preferred means of dispute resolution by amicable settlement,*
- *In case of failure of amicable agreement, the applicable jurisdiction is of the MS/region of the lead/coordinating partner*
- *for purposes of dispute resolution at court the English (French? German? Other?) version of the text of this agreement and its annexes is applicable*

Article 8

Amendment of the agreement

- *Only by written amendment agreed and signed by all of the cooperation partners*

- Any amendments to the agreement to be communicated to the relevant authorities in due course

This agreement has been finalised in < location >

Date

Signatories

1. Name of the partner
2. LAG code in list of LAG s (<http://ec.europa.eu/sfc/en/2014/support-ms/tnc>)
3. Registration code
4. Name of representative (project contact). Language spoken/understood
5. Name of the official representative (signature)
6. Position
7. Place (address, including country)
8. Telephone
9. E-mail

ANNEX 1: Description of project activities

1.1 Description of the general and specific objectives of the project

1.2 Description of target groups

1.3 Description of actions (including joint actions)

1.4 Schedule of activities

No.	Activity		Target group / location	Responsible/participating project partner(s)	Schedule (duration)	Key output
	Joint action	Local action				
1						
2						
...						

1.5 Breakdown of project budget by activity

No.	Activity	Planned maximum budget	Responsible project partner(s)
1			
...			

1.6 Breakdown of project budget by cooperation partner

No.	Name of cooperation partner	Planned maximum budget	Share of common costs (contribution to joint actions budget) ³
1			
...			

1.7 Breakdown of the project budget by cooperation partner and source of funding

Project cost in EUR			
	Total cost for the lifetime of the co-operation project*	Out of which	If other funds have been raised, please indicate*

³ Forms part of the *planned maximum budget* allocated to the cooperation partner. Note: the difference between the *planned maximum budget* and the *share of common costs* equals the maximum budget for local actions available to the respective cooperation partner.

No.	Partner		EAFRD*	other public contribution*	private contribution*	Fund name	Fund Contribution
1.							
...							

Exploring ways in which NRNs can contribute to the “harmonisation” of procedures

NRNs can make an important contribution to a better understanding of various procedures, including among others the activities related to achieving a common understanding of relevant rules under various RDPs and/or support to LAGs in preparing cooperation projects. This PWG theme aimed to explore how such NRN activities ‘work in practice’ by collecting examples of how regional and national rural networks can work together to facilitate the exchanges of information described here. One area of cooperation could be the use of technical assistance budgets of NRNs to support the preparation of TNC projects by LAGs through seminars, meetings, organising study visits, etc.

The relevant examples are presented under the ‘Examples’ section of this document.

Common definitions – joint action, common cost

The description of ‘joint action’ and ‘common cost’ provided below builds on and enhances the definitions provided in existing guidance documents, and it provides a generic framework/guidance to defining these elements of LEADER cooperation.

Joint action

An action can be defined as a joint action if it meets the following criteria:

- ✓ It contributes to the objectives of the participating LAGs’ LDSs,
- ✓ It produces a measurable output,
- ✓ It is agreed by the cooperation partners and defined in the application form as such,
- ✓ It is implemented with the involvement of all of the cooperation partners of the project,
- ✓ Its implementation can be coordinated by the coordinating/lead partner and a dedicated project manager.
- ✓ *Without this type of action – i.e. the LAGs acting on their own in the framework of only local actions / the project objectives would not be achievable*

Some examples of what a joint action may ‘produce’/aim at delivering:

- ✓ Common knowledge-base (methodological guidance, training package, ‘toolkit’ document with templates, labels, etc.) relating to a specific theme common to cooperation partners (etc. territorial branding, marketing of local products, local ‘action-pack’ to tackle the effects of climate change locally, awareness-raising related to social inclusion, etc.)
- ✓ Joint website or publications presenting the cooperation partners’ actions, initiatives, results of the project, etc.
- ✓ Purchase of an equipment that could be used by all of the cooperation partners (e.g. for local fairs and events)

Within the context of an inter-territorial or transnational cooperation project a joint action is the set of project activities that contribute to the objectives of the cooperating partners’ local development strategies planned

and implemented with the participation of the cooperation partners with the purpose of developing and/or producing a tangible⁴ and measurable output that benefits the cooperating partners.

The implementation of a joint action can be coordinated by the lead partner of the cooperation project or by a common structure set up by the cooperation partners for the purposes of the project.

Common costs

Within the context of an inter-territorial or transnational cooperation project, *common costs* relate to the inter-territorial or transnational project activities that constitute the joint action as defined in the project proposal and their coordination by the lead partner (if relevant).

'Common costs' relate to the implementation of joint actions – in particular to concrete activities the costs of which are shared among the cooperation partners. For example, common costs can be related to the payment of (IT and other) consultancy and/or other services required to produce a common brochure, website, publication, training package or other common 'product'.

Categories of common cost may include:

- ✓ Accommodation, catering, travel, rental of venue relating to joint events, meetings, workshops
- ✓ Consultancy and expert services relating to the development of joint products
- ✓ Other services relating to joint products (e.g. printing, graphic design for publications)
- ✓ Purchase of equipment for the purposes of the project (for equipment that can be used by all cooperation partners)
- ✓ Costs related to dedicated project staff (e.g. joint project manager)

Demonstrating the “added value” of cooperation / learning from mistakes

Cooperation between rural areas in Europe can strengthen local and European identities by helping partners in discovering their own values from the perspective of others, and learning to appreciate differences and similarities as valuable resources for mutual cooperation. Cooperation can also improve the competitiveness of participating rural territories by enhancing links between businesses, achieving a 'critical mass' for the introduction of new methods and approaches, which strengthens the innovative character and effectiveness of local development.

A good source for demonstrating this broad variety of cooperation benefits is the database of project nominations for the Nordic-Baltic LEADER Cooperation Award (more than 50 nominations for the Award in 2013). The nominations provide details about the projects, more specifically they also describe the results and transferability, the lessons learnt, the particular benefits, the innovation aspects and the impact of the project on regional development.

The project descriptions are available from <http://www.maainfo.ee/index.php?page=3604>.

Preparatory support for TNC projects

The LEADER preparatory technical support information template has been uploaded by the UK-SCO NSU. Preparatory support for LEADER co-operation in Scotland is available within a maximum threshold of 5000€ and it is approved by the LAG. The support will be a lighter version of a full application and the application can be completed online. The NSU can provide support to stimulate further actions.

Working Title of proposed project

⁴ Tangible outputs can relate to the preparation of various dissemination materials, training materials, websites, visual materials, as well as investments in building or equipment that demonstrably contribute to achieving project objectives.

Contact Details for Local Action Group submitting this template	
Name of Local Action Group (LAG)	
Name of Chairperson	
Name of main contact for this form	
E-mail address	
Telephone number	
Postal address	

Description of the Preparatory Technical Support project
<p>1. Brief description of the potential project for which Preparatory Technical Support is being sought. (around 250 words). This should include how the project links in with the priorities in your LDS and other relevant priorities and a timetable for the work.</p>
<p>2. Who has been identified as potential partner(s)* and what value do they add to the potential project? (*please identify by region/country)</p>
<p>3. What networking activity has already taken place with this/these potential partner(s) in association with this potential project? Attach evidence (e.g. copies of e-mails or minutes of meetings). Please summarise the outcomes and progress to date.</p>
<p>4. (i) What do you expect preparatory support to achieve and (ii) what are the desired outcomes for the Local Action Group area from the potential Co-operation project?</p>
<p>5. Explain why the proposed project is likely to be achievable if undertaken as a joint Cooperation action as opposed to a regular project?</p>

Partners		
Does the LAG see the opportunity to involve other partners?	YES	NO

Proposed Budget for Preparatory Technical Support project				
Anticipated Activities	Brief Description	Cost (indicate either £ or €)		
		Applicant LAG	Partner LAG(s)	Overall
Studies / Consultancy				
Product Development				
Travel / Subsistence				
Meetings / Hospitality				
Other (please detail)				
Total Costs				

Examples of relevant EU practice

Examples related to preparatory support

Preparatory support in Austria: Two options exist for covering the costs of a preparatory visit. These costs can be covered from the regular LAG-management costs or an application can be submitted to the Managing Authority for covering the costs for such kind of meetings (in this latter case the maximum rate of support is 80%).

Preparatory support in Finland: In Finland LAGs have 2 options, either they can cover the costs of preparatory visits from LAG's running costs, or they can set up a preparatory project. The preparatory project is funded from their own LAG quota for cooperation. This preparatory project is meant for the identification of potential project partners, organising study trips, and making the real TNC-project possible. The preparatory projects also include activities to activate and animate local stakeholders with a possible interest in the TNC or inter-territorial project.

Support to preparatory actions in the UK-Northern Ireland: In the UK-NIE, preparatory visits are eligible for support and it is understood that preparatory actions do not necessarily result in the implementation of a cooperation project (though it should be demonstrated that the preparatory actions aim to achieve this goal). The NSU plans to provide additional support for LAGs for events and study visits to facilitate the preparation of cooperation projects.

Support to preparatory actions in Portugal: In Portugal, preparatory actions will be supported (planned support rate 90% with maximum 5000 Euro per application (inter-territorial projects), 10000 Euro per application (transnational projects), the maximum total number of application is 3 per LAG), and the implementation of the cooperation project is not a condition of such support.

Examples related to NRN roles in ITC/TNC

"TNC-service package" by the Finnish NSU: The service package was developed to support goal-oriented transnational networking. When a potential TNC partner is identified, and first round of discussions completed through emails, skype, etc., and the partners are ready to sign a cooperation agreement, the NSU can contribute towards the costs of the travel of the Finnish counterpart to be able to attend the relevant meeting with partners. The TNC-service package can also be used to cover travel costs when attending EU-level working groups etc.

NRN support to preparatory actions in Spain: Preparatory visits here can be financed by the preparatory support in most cases, once the cooperation project is officially proposed. Prior to such official submission of a proposal, the NRN can support field visits for LAGs that have common interests and are planning to develop a cooperation project.

Developing a common procedure for inter-territorial cooperation in Spain: Through the NRN-coordinated Working Group, a common procedure for inter-territorial cooperation is being developed. This will establish the basic steps preceding the project approval by Mas/LAGs. This addresses the most important 'bottleneck' in cooperation procedures, the different lead lines for the approval in the different regions (some regions have chosen the option of public call instead of an ongoing call for projects). In the common procedure, the NRN would be coordinating the common approval of the Project.

The TNC toolkit developed by the NSU teams in Ireland and UK-Northern Ireland has 6 sections (Common guidance / Northern Ireland guidance / Ireland Guidance / Network Support Unit Offer – *the support available from the NRNs* / FAQs / Contacts of 10 Northern Ireland LAGs and 28 Ireland LAGs + contacts from across the UK).

The translated Leader TNC Guide in Greece. The Greek NRN has translated the relevant guides (incl. ENRD) in one publication that offer LAGs quick reference for cooperation subjects.

Examples related to TNC in general

The 'All-Island LEADER Cooperation Scheme' between UK-Northern Ireland and Ireland: Within the NIRD, there is a specific strand focusing on Cooperation between LAGs in Northern Ireland and those in Ireland. This is known

as the All-Island LEADER Cooperation Scheme. Each NI LAG is expected to participate in a minimum of two full Cooperation projects delivered under this Scheme. These projects may also involve LAGs from other Member States but as a minimum must involve at least one LAG from NI and one LAG from Ireland. (Source: Guidance for the implementation of LEADER Cooperation activities in the Rural Development Programme for Northern Ireland 2014-2020)

[The “LEAD MA/PA” concept applied in Germany:](#) This concept aims to facilitate a more coordinated process for cooperation project approval. In case of cooperation projects submitted for support with the existence of a ‘lead’ or coordinating LAG partner, the administrative rules relevant for the lead-partner will apply. 2 out of 13 RDPs in Germany include a provision that the Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies accept the administrative rules relevant for the lead-partner. In practice, this may mean that the cooperating LAGs in the two RDP territories have – for instance - different maximum thresholds for certain types of expenditure (e.g. printing of brochures), but the threshold applicable to the lead-LAG will be accepted by the Paying Agency.

[Recognising the “gradual nature of cooperation” and the importance of preparatory support in Northern Ireland:](#) Cooperation actions can be developed in three successive phases including networking, preparatory technical support (pre-development phase), and the implementation of the cooperation project. Receiving preparatory technical support does not imply an obligation to later carry out a cooperation project, but it is important that the LAG can demonstrate that it is envisaging the implementation of a concrete project. There should be no restriction on the number of preparatory actions that a LAG may implement, within a certain budget threshold. In NIE, a Preparatory technical support – Information template is used for applying for preparatory technical support. The *Cooperation Agreement* is an obligatory part of the application for support for cooperation projects. (Source: Guidance for the implementation of LEADER Cooperation activities in the Rural Development Programme for Northern Ireland 2014-2020)

[The distinction between ‘direct’ and ‘associate’ partners under the UK-Northern Ireland cooperation guidance:](#) The “Guidance for the implementation of LEADER Cooperation activities in the Rural Development Programme for Northern Ireland 2014-2020” makes the distinction between ‘direct’ and ‘associate’ partners in a cooperation project. Direct partners are defined in accordance with Article 44(2) of the EAFRD Regulation. Only actions led by LAGs selected for support under LEADER for NIRDP will be eligible for funding from EAFRD and the LAG will be the beneficiary of funding. However, LAG-led Cooperation projects may involve ‘associate’ partners who are publicly-funded or statutory-sector or community-based and operate within the relevant LAG’s territory. These associate partners - “brought” into the cooperation project by the LAGs - can be for instance local councils, community organisations, or a tourism body, etc. - from their local territories into the cooperation project.

[Funding agreements between LAGs in Scotland:](#) This approach is applied when more than 1 UK-SCO LAG participates in a co-operation project. A ‘lead LAG’ is agreed and all participating LAGs agree on the proportion of costs that will be borne out of the LDS allocation. For the purpose of payment claims the project deals with the lead LAG who pays the claims - budgets are then reconciled centrally by the Paying Agency. This approach is based on a lesson learnt from the past programming period and it reduces bureaucracy. The templates for this are now in preparation.

[The EMFF ‘cooperation landscape’](#) prepared by FARNET on EMFF LAGs describes the number of LAGs, possible project promoters, the level at which cooperation is organised, possible partner types and countries, the calls for cooperation, and cooperation specificities in relation to cooperation with EMFF FLAGs from BG, CY, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, UK.