

The Highland LEADER Programme

2014- 2020

Information for Applicants



Foreword

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the new 2014- 2020 Highland LEADER Programme. This will be a major source of grant funding for community development projects in Highland over the next few years. Development work for the programme has been underway since 2014 and it will be open for applications from May 2016.

This document explains the background and aims of LEADER funding. It sets out what the programme will support, and how decisions are made on grant applications. The document explains how priorities for LEADER funding have been set in Highland and what the programme seeks to achieve here. You will also be able to find out how to apply for LEADER funding and what you should ensure you cover in your application.

LEADER funding has the potential to make a real difference to communities in Highland. It is able to support a wide range of projects that deliver grass roots community development. The 2007- 2013 Highland LEADER programme supported some 367 projects in the area. We want to ensure communities continue to maximise the benefits to them from this source of funding

On behalf of the Highland LEADER team, we look forward to working with you, to help you realise your ambitions and deliver the projects that are important to your communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fiona Cameron', with a period at the end.

Fiona Cameron
Highland LEADER Programme Manager
May 2016

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LEADER Overview

What is LEADER?

LEADER is an EU fund intended to promote rural economic and community development. It operates in rural areas throughout the European Union. Its name comes from a French acronym and means

Liaison **E**ntre **A**ctions de **D**éveloppement de l'**E**conomie **R**urale or “links between actions for the development of the rural economy”. The fund has been in operation since the early 1990s and has grown significantly in scale and remit over the years. As well as promoting rural economic and community development, the fund promotes cooperation, networking and sharing of best practice. This is to encourage rural communities to learn from and build on each other’s experiences.

The other key aspect of LEADER is that it is very much a community led fund. It is about local people determining their own priorities for development within their areas and then making decisions as to which projects should receive LEADER funding to deliver these. How this works is explained in more detail further below.

The current LEADER programme covers the period 2014- 2020. Along with LEADER projects to promote local economic and community development, there are also specific ring fenced sums to support rural enterprise and business development, farm diversification and co-operation projects between communities both within the United Kingdom and also in other EU member states. *(See page 17 for more details on the different types of project that LEADER can fund)*

What Will LEADER Fund?

At a broad level, the fund looks for new project ideas or at least a clear development of existing projects or service provision. Development and innovation are key to what LEADER seeks to achieve in rural communities. The fund will not support the straight continuation of existing activities or provision. Similarly it will not fund routine repairs, maintenance or existing operating costs. To receive LEADER funding for a community project you have to be able to show that it is something new.

LEADER funding levels tend to be small to medium scale. As an indicative guide, a typical LEADER grant would be unlikely to exceed £50,000. There are circumstances in which they can however. LEADER will not fund 100% of the cost of a project. The % contribution varies and is set on a local basis.

How Are Decisions Made on LEADER Funding Priorities?

To help direct LEADER funding, EU member states are divided up by their governments into what are known as Local Action Groups (LAGs). In the UK, these broadly tend to cover the geographic boundaries of a local authority area. As it is a rural development fund, generally LEADER funding is not available in communities with a population of more than 10,000.

A LAG is responsible for consulting with communities within its area and identifying their needs and priorities for development. The LAG then produces a Local Development Strategy (LDS) to set out how these will be met, how it wants to target LEADER funding and what types of project it wishes to see come forward.

A LAG typically consists of around 20 voting members, supported by advisors where necessary. They are made up of a range of individuals representing both the public and the private/community/voluntary sectors. Because it is a community led fund, public sector representatives are not allowed to make up more than 49% of their membership.

LAGs make decisions on awarding LEADER funding to projects. They are usually supported by a team of development officers and administrators. Development officers assist projects with the application process, and present assessments to the LAG to inform their decision making. Administrators also advise potential applicants and deal with claims and grant payments.

LEADER in Scotland

In Scotland, LEADER is delivered as part of the wider Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP). It is one of 12 schemes within this. The other schemes are narrower in their focus, supporting specific topics such as forestry, beef farming, crofting support and food processing. LEADER can support a broader range of community development projects and is very much led and shaped at grassroots level.

Delivering LEADER in Highland

As with other areas in Europe, there is a Local Action Group with overall responsibility for delivering LEADER in Highland (a separate LEADER programme operates in the area of Highland covered by the Cairngorm National park and the programme does not operate in Inverness, due to its population exceeding 10,000). The Highland LAG has produced a Local Development Strategy for the area, based on the results of extensive community consultation and research. Like other LDS's, it sets out priorities for LEADER funding and what the programme aims to achieve in Highland by 2020. These are explained further on in this document. The Highland LAG is responsible for monitoring the progress of the programme, and deals with applications relating to rural enterprise, farm diversification, projects that will operate across all of Highland and cooperation projects with other LEADER programmes in the UK and further afield.

“Local Area Partnerships” in Highland

There is one aspect of delivering LEADER in Highland that is quite distinct from most other areas. This is the idea of the “Local Area Partnership”. Due to the size of Highland region and the diverse range of communities it contains, delivery of “core” LEADER projects (those that focus on general community development) is devolved from the Highland LAG down to seven Local Area Partnerships (LAPs).

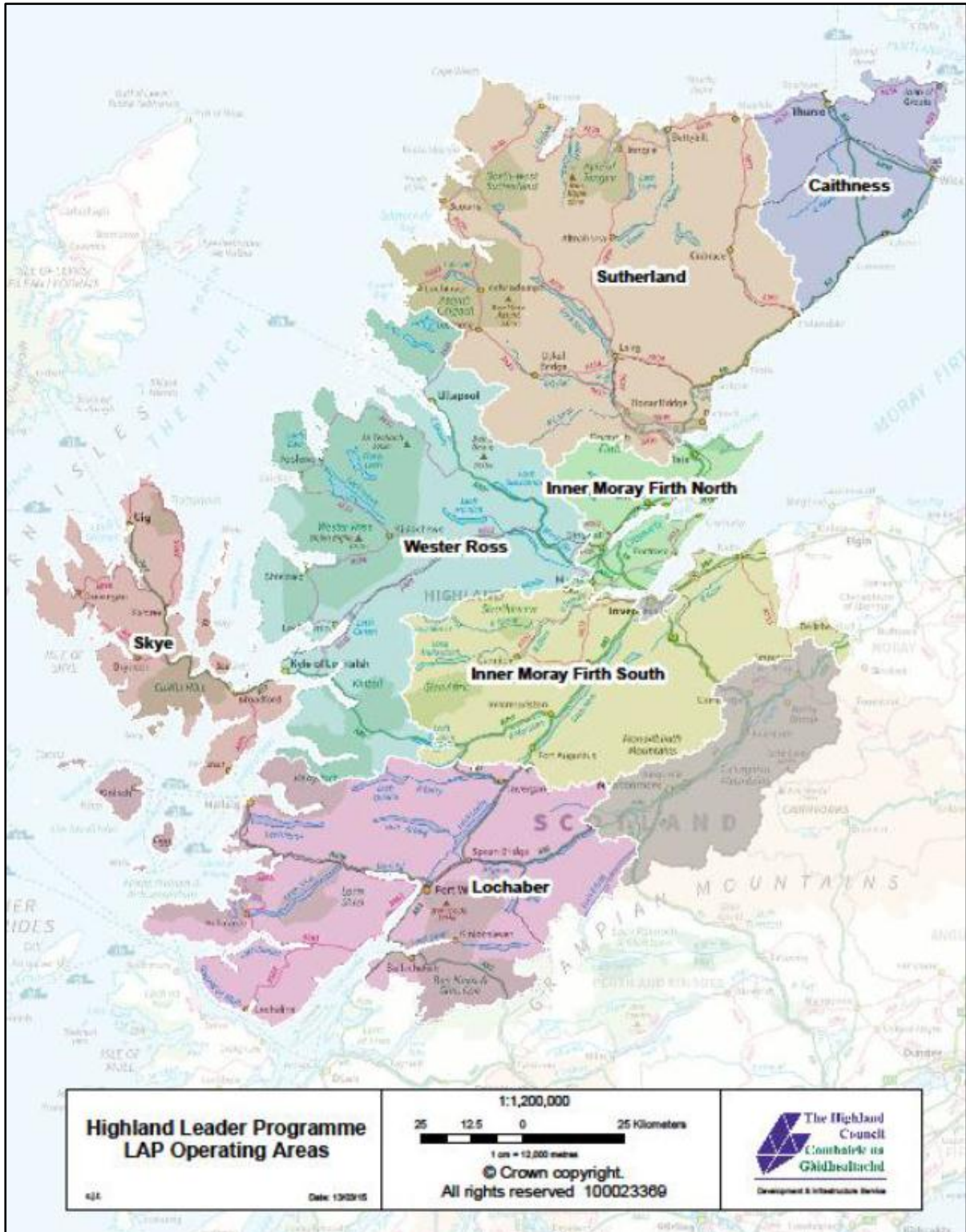
These LAPs carry out many of the roles of the Highland LAG, simply at a more local level. They are organised in the same way, with a mixture of public and private/ voluntary/community sector representatives. Like a LAG, they cannot comprise of more than 49% public sector representation. They are responsible for identifying and setting specific local development needs within their areas. To do this, they are tasked with producing specific local area action plans (LAAPs). They are also responsible for making leader funding awards within their areas. Each LAP receives a devolved LEADER budget, calculated on the basis of a number of indicators of rural deprivation, the size of the area and its population. Local level projects wishing to apply for LEADER funding apply to their local LAP.

Any type of organisation can apply for LEADER funding, as long as the idea can support the aims and objectives of the Local Development Strategy for the area.

The seven LAPs in Highland are shown below:

Highland LEADER's Seven Local Area Partnerships

(A separate programme operates in Cairngorm National Park, and City of Inverness is ineligible for LEADER funding due to population size)



Highland LEADER Budget

The total budget for the 2014- 2020 Highland LEADER programme is £8,805,388 and is broken down in the table below.

Programme administration, staffing costs, applicant support and promotion of programme	£2,201,347 (25%)
Co-operation Projects	£880,538 (10%)
Rural Enterprise Projects	£880,538 (10%)
Farm Diversification Projects	£880,538 (10%)
Strategic Pan Highland Projects – (projects working across all/ most Highland LAP areas)	£500,000 (5.68%)
Local Area Projects (the funding devolved and controlled by Local Area Partnerships) * see further breakdown in table below	£3,462,427(39.32%)
Total Indicative Allocation	£8,805,388 (100%)

*INDICATIVE ALLOCATIONS TO HIGHLAND LAPS	
Sutherland	£ 633,673.16
Inner Moray Firth North	£ 550,574.97
Lochaber	£ 547,978.15
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	£ 506,688.74
Caithness	£ 497,080.51
Inner Moray Firth South	£ 412,683.91
Skye	£ 313,745.13
Total	£ 3,462,424.57

The Highland Local Development Strategy for LEADER

An overall LEADER Local Development Strategy for Highland has been produced. This sets out the priorities for the programme in the area and what it is hoped to achieve for Highland overall by 2020, as a result of LEADER funding. The strategy includes 10 overall LEADER outcomes that shape the types of project the fund will support.

The seven Local Area Partnerships in Highland were then tasked with selecting which of these outcomes to prioritise for their own communities. This allowed them to determine at a very local level the types of project they wanted to support to meet their own specific local development needs.

The paragraphs below explain how the Highland Local development Strategy, and the subsequent Local Area Action Plans were produced.

Community Consultation

As part of the development of the Highland LDS, between June and September 2014 a number of public meetings, questionnaires, focus groups and stakeholder meetings were held. These were to gather people's views about what were local priorities for community development. It was crucial to engage across a wide range of community representatives, delivery partners, local businesses and other stakeholders in order to ensure the strategy fully reflected local needs and aspirations. Engagement was carried out over two distinct phases. This allowed a period of time in between to check the results of the initial engagement against the bigger picture and to refine conclusions on this basis.

The development process was overseen by a "Shadow" LAG. Membership of this group was drawn from the previous LAG that had overseen the 2007- 2013 Highland LEADER Programme, previous LAP members and the Highland Community Planning Partnership.

On the basis of the public meetings carried out, a draft SWOT analysis was produced for each of the LAP areas in Highland. This was circulated to all public event participants, Council ward managers and local elected members for comment and feedback. Together with the community consultation, additional research work and SWOT analysis led to the production of four initial headings. These broadly covered areas where LEADER funding might be targeted ("Population & Community", "Economy", "Quality of Life" and "Cultural & Natural Heritage"). These were then refined to ensure they accurately reflected what people felt the overall priorities and outcomes of the 2014- 2020 LEADER programme in Highland should be.

The second phase of engagement involved a survey which was circulated widely throughout Highland. In all communication it was clear that the opportunity was being offered to complete the survey over the phone or in face- face meeting for anyone without access to, or not confident using, the internet. A link to the consultation questionnaire was also put on the Facebook account of Highland Youth Voice.

The feedback from this exercise shaped the final vision for the programme, and the selection of 10 outcomes to direct LEADER funding and project eligibility. These are described below.

What Is LEADER Aiming To Achieve In Highland Following Consultation?

The overall vision and aim of the Highland LEADER Local Development Strategy for 2014- 2020 is twofold:

- **Stronger communities leading to improved quality of life for those who live in them**
- **Growth and diversification of the local economy**

Community consultation, research and SWOT analysis work undertaken in 2014 initially led to the production of four broad headings covering areas where LEADER funding might be targeted (“Population & Community”, “Economy”, “Quality of Life” and “Cultural & Natural Heritage”). These were then refined to ensure they accurately reflected what people felt the overall outcomes of the 2014- 2020 LEADER programme in Highland should be.

The finalised themes that were selected to direct funding and support achievement of the Local Development Strategy’s vision were:

1. **Stronger and More Resilient Communities**
2. **A Growing and Diversified Economy That Promotes Sustainability**
3. **Increased and Sustained Local Services and Activities**
4. **Enhanced Cultural, Natural and Heritage Assets**

The rationale behind the themes is described below.

Stronger and More Resilient Communities

This theme is of key importance in delivering the strategic vision of the Programme. It was ranked as the most important theme during the final consultation in September 2014.

This theme is about ensuring that communities have:

- the physical resources and infrastructure they need to thrive, such as transport links, amenities, broadband and buildings for community groups to use
- people with a wide range of skills, to meet challenges and respond to development opportunities, secure funding and deliver new projects or set up new businesses
- a wide range of well-resourced and knowledgeable community groups and volunteers providing local support services and working effectively in partnership with each other where appropriate
- the skills and confidence to take ownership of, or develop new, community assets and maximise their benefit to the local community- e.g. village halls, micro hydro schemes, community woodlands etc.
- a thriving local economy, with a wide range of businesses providing diverse products and services, and offering new employment opportunities
- a strong sense of local identity

With these things in place, we will help to deliver all round stronger communities that can support themselves, meet challenges, take advantage of development opportunities, and attract and retain people.

A Growing and Diversified Economy That Promotes Sustainability

We want to encourage more business start-ups and a more diversified economy in Highland, so that it grows and provides more local employment. A diversified economy means introducing new types of businesses and new products and services. It also means helping existing businesses to expand into new markets and deliver new services to increase their income. This is a vital part of what LEADER wants to achieve for Highland. A stronger economy will lead to more development opportunities for local communities in the future. Creating

additional jobs means that people have more disposable income to spend in Highland, helping to secure existing businesses and make them more sustainable. A wider range of employment and development opportunities is likely to lead both to more young people choosing to remain in Highland and more people choosing to re-locate here. This in turn promotes the long term sustainability and prosperity of our communities

Tourism is a key part of the Highland economy and it is felt there are many opportunities to enhance this. Tourism will therefore be a significant focus of the Highland LEADER programme in delivering this theme and encouraging business development and diversification. We want to support projects that encourage more visitors, ensure they receive the best experience possible and that the tourist season is extended where feasible. We also want to see new social enterprises developed, and projects that promote and develop local produce.

Increased and Sustained Local Services and Activities

We are interested in developing community services and activities that will make a difference both to people who live in Highland and also to visitors to the area. We want to help communities develop both new and improved local facilities. For example this might be better changing facilities for leisure activities or a central place in local communities with access to good broadband/WiFi. We want to support more community ownership and control of local services/activities where this is appropriate. We also want to see improved access, including transport access, to these services, activities and facilities. This theme has arisen from points made under the quality of life heading in the SWOTs. In general quality of life is considered to be high in Highland although it is recognised that there are pockets of deprivation masked by overall statistics.

Where negative points were made about quality of life these were related to isolation and difficulty in accessing activities and services. Access to high quality local services, a wide range of social activities and the facilities to support these are vital to improving quality of life in rural communities. Sustaining and raising the quality of life in Highland will help to retain people in the area and encourage people to relocate. This will help to bring in new skills to communities and also ensure existing services and provisions are secured for the future.

Enhanced Cultural, Natural and Heritage Assets

The SWOT identified key strengths in Highland under the broad heading of cultural, natural and heritage assets. Cultural assets include poetry, music, dance, traditional arts and crafts and the Gaelic language. Natural assets include a diverse landscape, mountains, lochs and forestry, an extensive coastline, and quality agricultural and marine produce. Highland also has a wide range of heritage assets, including diverse visitor attractions such as castles, historic houses, battlefields, ancient archaeological sites, and internationally renowned rail and canal routes. We want to ensure there is the best possible physical access to these assets. We also want to promote wider awareness and understanding of them, both to attract visitors and to help people to fully understand their significance and value.

We want to conserve and protect the assets we have and see new ones developed and opened up. We want people to be fully aware of the development opportunities these assets offer communities and to be able to take advantage of these.

Cross Cutting Themes

In addition to the four main themes above, there are five* cross cutting themes projects need to contribute to:

- 1. Fairer Highland – advancing equality (addressing equality issues and/or benefitting people in groups that are under-represented or disadvantaged)**
- 2. Innovation (a new or different approach is proposed within the area)**
- 3. Sustainability/Legacy (the project will continue to deliver benefits after LEADER funding)**
- 4. Carbon Clever (the project can demonstrate a positive impact on the environment)**
- 5. Skills Development (the project aims to expand the skills of those involved in implementing the project and/or on its participants)**

**It is recognised that it would be difficult for every project to contribute to all of these themes. Therefore all projects will have to demonstrate how they meet the first three. Cross cutting themes 4 and 5 will be delivered by projects where applicable. Applicants will be supported in this by the LEADER Development Officers.*

LEADER Outcomes

Following consultation, the ten outcomes below are the things we need to show have been achieved and delivered at the end of the programme as a result of LEADER funding. They reflect what people see as the main development needs for their communities. Under each outcome, we have explained what they could mean in practice for local communities. We have also provided examples of the types of project we would look to support to deliver these outcomes. Progress towards delivering these will be reviewed in 2017 and 2019.

Applicants to LEADER will need to demonstrate which outcome(s) their project helps to deliver. They will also need to show how their project supports wider work in these areas. For example, projects aiming to improve the visitor experience (outcome 7) should also show a fit with the Highland Tourism Action Plan. Applicants will be supported by Development Officers at application stage. The degree to which a project helps to deliver an outcome will form part of the assessment of the project.

Outcomes Summary

- 1. Impact of funded projects can be better demonstrated leading to increased capacity to secure future funds**
- 2. Increased community ownership/control of assets and services/activities**
- 3. People feel better supported to undertake volunteering opportunities**
- 4. Increased partnership working between groups (within and across areas, including intergenerational partnerships)**
- 5. Increased employment opportunities locally through new business start-ups and existing business diversification/development**
- 6. Increased income from local produce through adding value**
- 7. Improvements in the visitor experience**
- 8. People have better access to local services and activities**
- 9. Improved access for residents and visitors (physical and knowledge based) to cultural, natural and heritage assets**
- 10. Improved management/conservation/sustainability of cultural, natural and heritage assets**

1: Impact of funded projects can be better demonstrated leading to increased capacity to secure future funds

Being able to evidence the impact any project makes is vital. Individual projects need to show that they have been effective, in order to attract further grants, investment or additional service users or customers. It is important that projects know how to evaluate what they have delivered and present this clearly and effectively. At a higher level, entire grant programmes need to be able to demonstrate their impact. This is necessary in order to receive funding for future rounds, ensure funds are being targeted effectively to deliver the aims of the programme, make changes where necessary and in some cases to justify the use of taxpayers' money.

However, there are challenges in effectively showing the impact a project has had. Issues include lack of capacity/skills to undertake self-evaluation; lack of resources to commission external evaluations; lack of baseline evidence to compare projects with similar ones elsewhere. We want to ensure these issues are addressed. Given the importance of demonstrating the impact of projects, this issue has been set as one of the ten specific outcomes for the 2014- 2020 Highland LEADER Programme.

Eligible Activity

Eligible funding ideas will include capacity building around self-evaluation; resource to support baseline evidence gathering; resource to support external evaluation for projects; training in digital media evaluation techniques.

2: Increased community ownership/control of assets and services/activities-

Community ownership, or control, of land or buildings can be a key way in which rural communities can develop. This can be about protecting or enhancing local facilities, creating new spaces and new uses, or generating income for community activities and development projects. Community ownership can bring a new lease of life to facilities; it can increase community confidence, and allow communities to take more control of their own development needs. Examples of this might include retaining a local shop, renovating a derelict site or providing a new hub for community activities. Control of local assets can be a key factor in making a community more attractive to live in, supporting economic regeneration and sustainable development. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill seeks to extend the community right to buy and make asset transfer requests easier. Highland LEADER seeks to support local communities to take advantage of this opportunity.

Eligible Activity

Eligible projects will include all aspects of community ownership from feasibility through to acquisition; support for future planning and developments to existing community owned and led services; projects which increase community engagement with community development and planning; projects that aim to put income earning opportunities within the hands of local communities. Initiatives under this outcome should take account of the potential for displacement and there should be engagement with the business sector to protect businesses that use the asset the community is acquiring. It should also be possible for business in a community be supported to work together and acquire an asset.

3: People feel better supported to undertake volunteering opportunities

Volunteers play a crucial role in many community projects in Highland. However, it is recognised that there is high pressure on them at times. There is a need for more volunteers generally, for more young people to take up volunteering and for volunteers to have the opportunity to increase the range of skills they can offer.

If more volunteers are to be attracted to help deliver projects in Highland, it is essential that there is support for them to participate and develop new skills. Local consultations stressed the importance of this. During final consultation in September 2014, 95% of respondents agreed with this outcome.

Eligible Activity

Eligible projects might include capacity building for volunteer managers; support for new ways to engage younger volunteers; communication and feedback tools for working with volunteers; projects that provide volunteers with transferable skills; provision of tools to help volunteers communicate and support each other. Projects which promote/value community based volunteering or combat volunteer fatigue

4: Increased partnership working between groups (within and across areas, including intergenerational partnerships)

Local consultations have identified the need to support more partnership working within and between communities in the Highlands and further afield. Supporting the development of both existing and new partnerships can lead to more effective project delivery and more efficient use of funding and resources. It can also mean new ideas can be developed, communities can learn from each other's experiences, and new approaches to community development can be delivered.

However communities and businesses require support to develop partnership working. This might be something as simple as being able to visit a project in another area. It might involve supporting the evaluation of existing ways of working and identifying ways in which working with others might improve the effectiveness of a project. Once identified, support may be needed to train people in new ways of working and put in place systems and procedures to support this. Where new partnership working involves projects from other LEADER areas in Highland or further afield, these will be classed as co-operation projects. During final consultation in September 2014, 93% of survey respondents agreed with this outcome.

Eligible Activity

Eligible projects may include funding for partnership events; visits between partner areas; one-off facilitation for capacity building around new project ideas; communication/information/networking tools, preparatory and other costs for co-operation projects; development of networks at local and Highland wide level; shared learning events; mentoring programmes. Further detail on the types of project that may be funded under co-operation is included below.

5: Increased employment opportunities locally through new business start-ups and existing business diversification/development

A strong local economy is essential in order to create development opportunities for Highland Communities. The LEADER programme aims to encourage more business start-ups and create a more diversified economy in Highland, so that it grows and provides more local employment. We want to help introduce new types of businesses and new products and services. We also want to help existing businesses to expand into new markets and deliver new services to increase their income. Creating additional jobs means that people have more disposable income to spend in Highland, helping to secure existing businesses and make them more sustainable. A wider range of employment and development opportunities is likely to lead to more young people choosing to remain in Highland. It will also help encourage more people to relocate to the area, bringing new skills. This in turn promotes the long term sustainability and prosperity of our communities.

Eligible Activity

Feasibility and development of new and existing businesses in terms of capital and revenue; support for social enterprises; projects that promote partnership within and across sectors; support for new businesses; training and employability skills; business infrastructure (e.g. business units, chilling facilities); support to introduce more efficient processes including in the wider supply chain.

6: Increased income from local produce through adding value

Highland region produces superb local food and drink, renowned for its high quality. It is also famous for a wide range of traditional arts and crafts products. However, there are ways in which the value of these can be increased, leading to greater income directly for their producers, rather than distributors and retailers further down the supply chain. Highland LEADER is keen to help maximise the income generating opportunities for producers in the region and this will also have benefits for the communities in which they are based. Adding value to a product involves thinking creatively about a number of issues including how it is marketed, branded, packaged, its target audience and customer demands. It is about making products stand out in the market place in terms of unique identity and high quality.

Eligible Activity

Projects including development and feasibility work on adding value to local produce; promotion of local produce including through a co-ordinated approach; collaboration between food/drinks producers and cultural activities/events; development of food networks and trails.

7: Improvements in the visitor experience

Tourism is a major element of the Highland economy and as such has the potential for a high impact on the strategic vision- for example by creating new employment or volunteering opportunities. Improving the visitor experience also offers scope for new business start-ups to cater for the demands of tourists. Ultimately, increased visitor numbers and tourist spend means a stronger economy in Highland. However, in order to attract visitors in an increasingly competitive market, and the associated benefits for our communities, the visitor experience in Highland must be first rate. This means ensuring existing attractions offer the best experience possible and supporting any development necessary to achieve this. It also means identifying gaps in the tourism market and supporting projects to fill these. Supporting and developing tourism has been raised constantly through the consultations.

Eligible Activity

Eligible projects: anything which can demonstrate it will lead to an improved visitor experience which may include enhancing an existing attraction/service, providing wet weather facilities (as this has been identified as an area of need in several areas) developing and testing innovative ideas; provision of sustainable transport solutions for visitors; projects which promote cultural tourism.

8: People have better access to local services and activities

People in Highland communities are keen to have access to a range of local services and activities, without necessarily having to travel long distances. This links back to the themes of “stronger and more resilient communities” and “increased and sustained local services and activities”. In some instances this may be about developing such services/activities, in others it is about improving access to those which already exist. The eligible activity below sets out a range of examples where Highland LEADER can support projects to deliver this outcome. Transport is a key issue in relation to access in some local areas, in others it is about basic information sharing, improved internet access (available to residents and visitors alike) and improved websites. During final consultation in September 2014, 95% of survey respondents agreed with this outcome.

Eligible Activity

Examples of projects eligible to achieve this outcome include: feasibility studies and development costs for new services/activities identified as a need within the community; local solutions for community transport issues, including ways of integrating transport schemes; feasibility and development of local internet/WiFi centres for use by residents and visitors; wider initiatives to tackle increased broadband provision and access; improved information-sharing locally including local website improvement; feasibility and development of projects that address access to housing and improved access to job opportunities; projects that promote inclusion and well-being; health activities across age groups; local solutions to address the needs of an ageing population; services for vulnerable individuals and families including piloting initiatives; services that tackle re-offending, youth disengagement and substance misuse; community re-use and recycle IT schemes; training for basic repairs and maintenance. Applicants will be expected to demonstrate how new initiatives can become sustainable.

9: Improved access for residents and visitors (physical and knowledge based) to cultural, natural and heritage assets.

Cultural, natural and heritage assets in Highland have been highlighted throughout the consultation period and in existing policy documents as a key strength of the area. Local people see that improved access can be of benefit both for them and for visitors. There are benefits in terms of raising the national and international profile of Highland to attract more visitors. Through improving access to the natural landscape there are both health and tourism benefits to be gained. Access can take different forms: it can relate to physical access (better pathways and cycle paths; better linkages between adjacent sites), it can relate to the feasibility and development of new sites, and it can also relate to better awareness and knowledge about what is available through information boards, newsletters, websites, marketing and promotion.

Eligible Activity

Projects that would contribute to this outcome could include: new pathways and cycle paths, particularly where they link up to other existing paths/cycle routes or create linkages between local villages and sites or have health related benefits; improved access for disabled people to sites; feasibility studies/development of new

sites; information products, websites, marketing and promotion initiatives; projects which promote safe access and appropriate signage; projects which promote the opportunities for cultural activities to be accessed locally, opportunities to improve biodiversity and habitats around paths and tracks; improved access to archaeological sites; projects which promote the Gaelic language and culture.

10: Improved management/conservation/sustainability of cultural, natural and heritage assets

This is a distinct outcome from improving access to cultural, natural and heritage assets. It focusses more on “behind the scenes” work relating to these assets. While improving access is important, this outcome focusses on longer term work that is vital to ensure improved management, conservation and sustainability of assets. Through ensuring these issues are addressed, LEADER will help to develop accessible, well managed and sustainable cultural, natural and heritage assets for Highland. In doing so, we will help communities to maximise the benefits from them for the long term. During final consultation in September 2014 91% of respondents agreed with this outcome. It is again noted that assets does not always refer to physical objects, for example the Gaelic language could be considered a cultural asset.

Eligible Activity

Examples of projects that will achieve this outcome include; capacity building for volunteers/staff in managing cultural, natural and heritage assets; conservation projects that involve local people/volunteers and potentially can benefit visitors to the area; feasibility studies to explore new ways of sustaining what exists; projects that contribute to energy conservation and carbon reduction as well as general protection for the environment (marine and terrestrial); conservation of built heritage; management of natural assets; projects identifying and enhancing ecosystem services and training for conservation volunteers; community asset ownership.

Selecting Local Priorities and Developing LAAPS

As noted previously, to devolve decision making on LEADER funding to as local a level as possible, Highland is divided up into seven Local Area Partnerships (see page 2). Each of these partnerships has set its own specific local priorities for LEADER funding and produced a Local Area Action Plan to direct these.

In each area, a steering group oversaw this process. Community councils were invited to nominate an individual from their respective areas to sit on these groups. This was to ensure that firstly, they were representative of the geography of their area. Members of the previous Local Area Partnerships from the 2007- 2013 LEADER Programme were also invited to sit on the steering groups, together with local councillors.

Using information gathered during the community consultation work to develop the overall strategy for LEADER in Highland, these groups selected the LEADER outcomes they wished to prioritise for their areas. They then set out the types of projects and activities they would seek to support locally. Once these were set, their other key task was to identify the correct skills set that would be required to make up the final Local Area Partnership group’s membership. For example, if a local plan had as one of its priorities the development of small renewable energy schemes, the group would require at least one member with specific knowledge and expertise of that type of project. Once the necessary skills set was identified, recruitment adverts were placed in local media and applications were sought to make up the full Local Area Partnership.

Once these partnerships met, their first task was to agree (or amend) and sign off the Local Area Action Plan for LEADER. Seven Local Area Partnerships are now in place around Highland (as of April 2016), with approved Local Area Action Plans, and ready to begin assessing LEADER applications

The LEADER Application Process

What Can Leader Fund?

Provided the idea is new or at least a clear development of an existing project or service provision, LEADER can support anything set out in the eligibility section of this document. However, the key thing to remember is that local areas will have set their own funding priorities and your application will need to fit with these. You must check with your Local Area Action Plan to see if your idea fits with its priorities.

Who Can Apply To LEADER?

Any type of organisation can apply for LEADER funding, as long as the idea can support the aims and objectives of the Local Development Strategy for the area.

How Much Can I Apply For?-

See www.highlandleader.com for funding levels and grant rates available in your local area.

How Do I Apply to LEADER?

There are five broad types of project that LEADER can support. There are some slight differences in the application processes for these, as set out in the table below. Essentially however, there are three stages to any application:

The Three-Stage Application Process

- 1. Expression of Interest-** a short form, accessed via the Scottish Rural Network website at <http://www.ruralnetwork.scot/funding/leader> This asks you for a short overview of your project, to enable us to assess if it is technically eligible for LEADER funding, if it broadly supports what LEADER is trying to achieve in Highland, and whether or not there are other funds more suitable for you to apply to.
- 2. Pre- Application Form-** If we approve your expression of interest, you will be given a pre-application form. This asks for more details about your project, including timescales, anticipated costs, how it will support what LEADER is seeking to achieve, equalities issues, local community consultation and support for your idea, and who else is going to fund it. The pre-application form is assessed by a LEADER Development Officer and scored (see table below). This score, together with feedback, will determine how likely it is that a full application to LEADER will be successful.
- 3. Full Application Form-** this is the form on which the final decision will be made as to whether LEADER will fund your project. It is completed online and will ask for details on all aspects of your project. You will need to provide supporting documents such as a business plan and letters of support from the local community. You will also need your match funding confirmed. Remember that LEADER can only fund a % of your project costs and you will need money from other sources to make up the total project budget. LEADER can give you an “in principle” decision subject to your match funding being confirmed. However, we can only hold this open for a maximum of two months and then we would have to withdraw our offer. It is better if you can apply to LEADER with all your other match funding confirmed if you can. As per the pre-application form, the full application is assessed by a LEADER Development Officer and scored (see table below) to reach a final decision on funding.

How Long Does An Application Take?

A LEADER application can be a fairly lengthy process and you should bear this in mind when planning a project. The programme receives a high volume of enquiries and applications and these take time to assess and process. You will need to submit your completed pre-application at least **8 weeks** before the meeting at which it is to be assessed. If feedback from this meeting results in you submitting a full application, that will also need to be submitted at least **8 weeks** in advance of the meeting to consider this. Meeting Dates and deadlines for submission can be found at www.highlandleader.com

What Happens If I Am Successful?

If your application is successful, we will write to you with a formal offer of grant, together with various terms and conditions. You will need to sign this and return it before you can start your project. Before signing, a LEADER Development Officer will meet with you to go through the contents, to ensure you are clear on what your obligations will be.

How Will I Receive My LEADER Money?

LEADER does not pay out grants in advance of work being undertaken. You will need to incur project expenditure and then claim it back from LEADER, typically on a quarterly basis. You will do this by completing a claim form, together with updates on how your project is progressing. You will need to submit original invoices and bank statements showing that they have been paid. LEADER staff will provide you with guidance and support in this. The application process will ask about cash flow for the project and how you plan to manage this.

Types of LEADER Project

Type	Overview	Decision Making Body
Local Project	A LEADER project operating in a specific local community, or the boundaries of a single Local Area Partnership	Relevant Local Area Partnership
Strategic Project	A LEADER project operating across Highland	Highland Local Action Group
Co-operation Project	A LEADER project involving partners from other areas either in the UK or elsewhere in Europe	Highland Local Action Group
Rural Enterprise	A LEADER project targeted specifically at business start-up/ development and employment opportunities. These are likely to be projects that are more commercial in nature rather than “not for profit”.	Enterprise Sub- Group of Highland Local Action Group
Farm Diversification	A LEADER project targeted specifically at farms or crofts seeking to diversify and develop non-agricultural sources of income- for example a farm seeking to offer quad biking or a golf driving range.	Enterprise Sub- Group of Highland Local Action Group

What Makes A Good LEADER Application?

You should always discuss the specifics of your application with your local LEADER Development Officer. However, the following general points will help you to make a stronger application.

- Show how your project helps to deliver the objectives of your Local Area Action Plan for LEADER. Make sure you familiarise yourself with this document. It is the benchmark against which your project will be assessed for eligibility and suitability for funding
- Also think about the “bigger picture”- what wider national strategies or plans might your project help to deliver their objectives?
- Build your case- provide clear evidence of need and demand for your project. LEADER is a community led fund- show that you have consulted with the local community about your project and that there is support there for it.
- Be able to show what’s NEW about your project and that it’s not a continuation project or duplication of any existing local provision
- Have a clear idea of project costs and be able to show how you have arrived at these- for example quotes, or examples of comparable projects elsewhere
- Think carefully about project timescales and what you need to achieve by when. When you apply, you will be asked to set out clear project milestones. You will have to show you have met these before you can claim money from LEADER
- There is quite a lot of reporting and record keeping involved with a LEADER project- ensure you will have a good administrative and record keeping system in place to support your project
- The application process asks specifically about equalities issues- think carefully about how your project can be as inclusive as possible and whether any actions are required to help any groups to participate
- Show that you have carefully considered project cash flow and that you have allowed enough time for your LEADER claim to be processed and paid out
- You will be asked about your project’s expected targets and outcomes- be able to show how you have arrived at these- are they realistic? How will you prove you achieved them? How will you evaluate if your project has delivered what it set out to?
- First impressions are important- Is the form clearly written? Are all questions answered? Do figures add up correctly? Are signatures and contact details included? Is all supporting documentation attached?
- Does your organisation have the necessary skills to deliver the project? Do you need to bring in external support to help you? Have you factored this cost into your project?
- Have you identified possible risks to the project’s success and contingency plans to deal with these? Don’t dismiss this issue- funders expect there to be risks- the important thing is to show you have considered and planned for them.

Overall, you should remember that LEADER wants and needs to commit all of its project funds. We have objectives for Highland that we want to deliver, and it is through community led projects that we will do this. However, we need to:

- see how a project meets our aims & objectives
- be assured the project has been well planned
- know that it has community support
- be assured it will be administered and delivered effectively

The Highland LEADER Team are here to help you and look forward to hearing about your project idea. Please don't hesitate to get in touch to discuss things further.

Useful Contacts and Links

The Highland LEADER Programme Manager is Fiona Cameron Tel. 01463 702 524, e-mail fiona.cameron4@highland.gov.uk

For specific types of project, please see the table below.

Project Type/ Area	Key Contact
Local Projects- Caithness & Sutherland	Paula Betts Telephone: 01463 702275 Mobile: 07827281469 e-mail paula.betts@highland.gov.uk
Local Projects- Skye, Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	Liz Whiteford Telephone- 07920 543719 e-mail liz.whiteford@highland.gov.uk
Local Projects- Inner Moray Firth North	Judith Wainwright Telephone- 01463 702570 Mobile- 07557 480870 e-mail Judith.wainwright@highland.gov.uk
Local Projects- Inner Moray Firth South	Fiona Daschofsky Telephone- 01463 702 542 e-mail fiona.daschofsky@highland.gov.uk
Local Projects- Lochaber Strategic & Co-operation Projects	Martin Culbertson Telephone- 01397 707 209 Mobile- 07827 281 468 e-mail martin.culbertson@highland.gov.uk
Rural Enterprise/ Farm Diversification	Fiona Cameron Telephone- 01463 702 524 e-mail fiona.cameron4@highland.gov.uk

Useful Links

- Highland LEADER Website www.highlandleader.com
- Information on other funding schemes within the Scottish Rural Development Programme www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP/SRDP20142020Schemes
- LEADER Expression of Interest Form www.ruralnetwork.scot/funding/leader
- Advice About Other Funding Options www.fundingscotland.com/

Re-cap of Key LEADER Terms

- **LAG- Local Action Group-** a group consisting of representatives from the public and private/voluntary/ community sectors, tasked with identifying economic and community development needs within a geographic area (e.g. Highland). The LAG develops a plan to meet these needs and considers applications for LEADER funding to deliver projects in the area.
- **LDS- Local Development Strategy-** the overarching plan developed by the LAG to deliver economic and community development within its area
- **LAP- Local Area Partnership-** a similar group to a LAG, but operating at a more local level, e.g. Lochaber. Intended to devolve decision making on LEADER to as local a level as possible
- **LAAP- Local Area Action Plan-** a more local level plan for LEADER funding, again reflecting Highland's desire to devolve decision making to as local a level as possible.