Recommendations for a future LEADER programme

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This set of recommendations supplements those drawn from the 2014-2020 LEADER programme evaluations produced by Currie et al. in February 2022. They were developed during a workshop in which social scientists from the James Hutton Institute contributed additional recommendations based on their knowledge of LEADER and other rural development programmes in Scotland and abroad.

Scope of the programme

- Maintain a predominantly rural focus, limiting spillover into urban and suburban concerns. Consider including remote small towns, which have distinctive development issues.
- Use the programme to reach a better understanding of disparities within rural areas (rural-urban inequalities have previously received much attention).
- Focus on addressing rural and island depopulation and related concerns as well as concerns associated with in-migration and second-home ownership (e.g. affordable housing shortages).
- Encourage applications that respond to the particularities of different places.
- Encourage cross-sectoral working between communities of interest within communities of place.
- Engage with local residents and ensure they have a voice.
- Consider whether a defined set of Scottish Government policy objectives for communities to choose from might simplify the application process and lead to more explicit impact.
- Minimise the focus on innovation to allow successful projects to continue to do and consolidate what works.
- Reduce the perceived focus on agriculture and agri-food.
- Consider funding business incubators to start up and test new ideas.
- Ensure that a strong focus on rural businesses and employment does not result in neglecting other types of actors providing social value and social services.

Increasing inclusion

- Develop multidimensional metrics to measure variations in rural development, assets and disadvantages to inform allocations (a tool akin to the [Socio-Economic Performance (SEP) Index](#)). As a dimension of this, map which communities are well served by existing rural policy mechanisms (and/or which have a longer-term record of obtaining funding) and which are left out, keeping in mind that City-Region Deals may not serve rural areas well.
- Support could be better tailored to the capabilities and capacity of different communities, helping those who have not previously applied for funding to do so while encouraging re-application by previously successful communities.
- Resource intermediary organisations[1] to work with new applicants to develop their proposals; think about creating intermediaries in places where they do not already exist.
- Consider who has previously faced barriers to participating in LEADER, not just in terms of geography but also in terms of gender, age and minority groups.
- Ensure funding criteria are sufficiently broad to encourage applications from new communities whose goals were not within the original scope of LEADER.
- Provide awareness-raising and training in applying for funding to improve understanding of the programme and project management training to help build community capacity.
- Review past unsuccessful LEADER applications to understand where unmet demand exists.

Funding mechanisms

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[1] An intermediary organisation is usually working at a regional or national scale aiming to enable community organisations to meet their aspirations by providing support such as knowledge of what has worked well elsewhere and help in accessing funding.

- In facilitating the increased inclusion in future funding, put in place mechanisms to encourage applications from disadvantaged communities, e.g. a two-tier funding model whereby disadvantaged communities are given additional funding, or a preliminary fund with payment up-front to develop projects with first-time applicants.
- Encourage projects to build in flexibility to respond to changing circumstances that impact localities in particular ways, and give them autonomy to use their budgets to do so.
- Minimise the time gap between submission of applications and funding decisions.
- Ensure continuity of funding between cycles with no delay in between.
- Put simple procedures in place to allow the co-financing of project ideas with match funding.
- Consider longer funding periods to address long-term challenges and ensure alignment with long-term policy goals to allow time for meaningful impact.

Governance and support
- Recognise that rural and island communities are currently experiencing burnout as a result of the work involved in responding to Covid-19 and may need additional assistance (e.g. from intermediary organisations) to embark on new applications.
- Put procedures in place to facilitate relationships and ensure regular communication between actors at different levels where this would be helpful for projects or resolve conflicts, and to share experiences with other projects.
- Engage with anchor[2] organisations when attempting to further develop new and existing partnerships.
- Provide support for adaptable local businesses.
- Value local expertise rather than adopting a more pedagogical approach.
- Consider novel ways of engaging with new projects and keep in touch through social media networking, which is becoming the norm for some community groups.
- Consider how to better align and synthesise policy objectives so that the new programme can work cross-sectorally and avoid working in silos, reducing the burden on volunteer members of Local Action Groups.

Administration
- Enable under-resourced communities to apply, animate and develop ideas by reducing the level of administration that was involved in LEADER.
- Ensure that training and development initiatives are seen by participants as more than a 'tick-box' exercise.
- Ensure that Local Action Groups are sufficiently resourced and staffed.
- Consider creative ways of enabling communities that have not previously applied for funding to do so (e.g. hackathons).
- Allow greater flexibility in administrative and reporting procedures and so that they are more proportionate to the size of the project.

Impact
- For more entrepreneurial projects, consider a "payment by results" model that rewards community wealth building activities and access to ongoing funding for further growth.
- Tailor measurements of success to the goals of the project.
- Adopt a more formative or dynamic evaluation philosophy including forum for LAGS to peer support each other and help improve all delivery.
- Provide clear guidance to projects regarding different kinds of impact and how they can be measured.
- Consider mechanisms for recording ongoing impact after projects have concluded, particularly for projects that are initiating long-term change such as those with a social or environmental focus.

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[2] An anchor organisation is place-based with a mission inherently bound up in the local area.