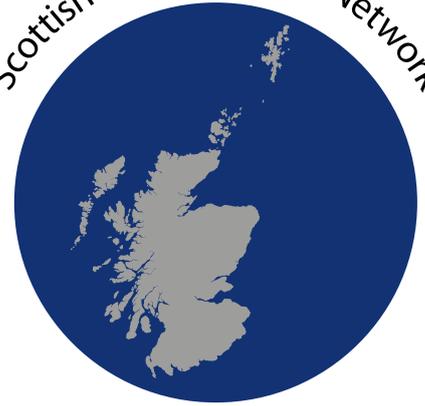


Scottish National Rural Network



CONNECTING RURAL SCOTLAND

The Scottish National Rural Network 2008-2013



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development
Europe investing in rural areas



The Scottish
Government



INTRODUCTION

Under the European Rural Development Regulations for 2007-2013, each Member State was required to set up a national rural network. This requirement built on the success of the pan-European LEADER network activity under the previous EU rural development programme.

Its aim was that stakeholders, armed with an understanding of national and regional rural development issues, would be better placed to learn from each other and to take advantage of development opportunities.

The Scottish National Rural Network was founded on three elements: the Rural Gathering event in 2009; the Scottish National Rural Network website; and the Scottish National Rural Network Regional Co-ordination service.

THE SCOTTISH RURAL GATHERING

The Scottish Rural Gathering took place in Perth on 25 September 2009. It attracted around 300 people from all parts of Scotland and was generally regarded as a great success by delegates who had the opportunity to network,

share best practice and celebrate all that rural Scotland has to offer.

An archive of reports and information on the event can be found on the Scottish National Rural Network website¹.

WEBSITE, NEWSLETTER AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The Rural Network website was established in April 2009, with a mission to “connect rural Scotland in all its diversity to promote economic growth and community development”. The website is a Scottish Government initiative, hosted and developed by Sopra Group with content and editorial services provided by the Rural Team at the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

The site provides news, information and networking opportunities for everyone living and working in rural Scotland, and helps them to keep in touch with similar communities in the rest of the UK, Europe and beyond. Through the use of interactive communication tools, it has aimed to facilitate the sharing of common

issues and examples of good practice by rural development practitioners and stakeholders.

The site also provides help with finding out about funding opportunities for a wide range of rural projects, publicises events in Scotland and throughout the UK and Europe which help promote sustainability and economic growth, and disseminates information about innovative social, economic and environmental initiatives.

A database of around 1,500 rural projects, including many funded by LEADER, is supplemented by a series of around 40 in-depth project case studies. These range from a community radio station² to a Junior Ranger Project³ by way of museums, community centres, recycling projects and many more.

¹ <http://www.ruralgateway.org.uk/en/node/1270>

² <http://www.ruralgateway.org.uk/en/node/7182>

³ <http://www.ruralgateway.org.uk/en/node/3837>

By October 2013, the website held more than 6,000 discrete items of information, including news stories, events listings, bulletin board announcements, project database entries and project case studies. Over 1,900 of these were added directly or indirectly by users of the site.

From the launch of the website until December 2013, there have been 310,641 visits to it, an average of 5,386 a month, and 922,471 page views, giving an average of 16,472 a month.

While the initial vision of extensive interactive debate on the website itself did not really happen, the associated social media accounts built up over the years to be a vital part of the SNRN activity, promoting, linking to and generating debate on content and building relationships throughout and beyond Scotland.

At the time of writing, the SNRN twitter account has around 2,750 followers, there have been more than 5,000 channel views on YouTube and over 120,000 views of the photostream on Flickr. The last statistic was helped by entries to the very successful Seasons of Rural Scotland photo competition, which generated 440 entries and a great deal of interest from across Scotland and indeed the world.

Every Friday, the Rural Network News email newsletter goes out to around 2,500 subscribers and survey and anecdotal evidence suggests that



it is forwarded on to many more. The newsletter highlights articles, features and news items which have been added to the site that week. Taking one issue at random, from July 2013⁴, three of the stories are reporting on or seeking participants for SNRN events and there are also stories about expressions of interest for the next LEADER programme, investment sessions about the Climate Challenge Fund, honey bee health inspection visits, a film maker talent search and a recipe for Meadow Flower Scented Honey. There is also the 60th Rural Ramblings – a humorous column by friend of the SNRN and author Patrick Vickery.

REGIONAL COORDINATION SERVICE

The Regional Coordination Service was set up to be a technical service facilitating local events within a coherent framework designed to maximise local knowledge of rural development issues, opportunities and inspirational practice throughout Scotland, the UK and Europe.

It was based on the premise that stakeholder sharing of knowledge and experience among interest groups at country, national and transnational level should help strengthen the rural voice in policy design, maximise the use of the rural development resources and contribute to community empowerment.

In July 2009, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) won the tender for this contract, promising to “get rural people speaking to each other and working together in the best interests of all parts of rural Scotland”. The initial contract ran for two years and was then renewed for two further one year periods, finally ending in July 2013. Almost 2,000 people from every part of rural Scotland attended a variety of Rural Network events during this time.

⁴ <http://www.ruralgateway.org.uk/en/node/8061>

RURAL NETWORK EVENTS 2009-2010: AROUND RURAL SCOTLAND

The first year of the contract involved the planning, organisation and delivery of 20 events across rural Scotland. One event was held in each LEADER area, although it was made clear that these were not LEADER networking events but events that included LEADER.

The development of the programme of events involved meetings, contacts and discussions with a wide range of rural stakeholders across the country, including LEADER Local Action Groups, Regional Project Assessment Committees (RPACs), Local Authorities, third sector support groups and representative organisations such as Scottish Rural Property & Business Association (now Scottish Land & Estates), NFU Scotland and the Development Trusts Association Scotland.

The practical organisation of the events was carried out in co-operation with local stakeholders, in particular the staff of the LEADER LAGs.

Despite a few glitches, the occasional misunderstanding

and some truly appalling weather, the level of co-operation and assistance in the organising of the events was very high and very much appreciated by the organisers.

Speakers from the LAGs and RPACs were contacted directly, and presentations about local projects were sourced and contacted, with the use of the Rural Network website project database and the co-operation of LAG and RPAC staff. Considerable efforts were made to ensure that there was always at least one LEADER and one Rural Priorities project at each event, and to ensure that one project was from outside the area where the event was being held.

Booking for the events was carried out online through SurveyMonkey, with an email invitation containing a link to the survey. This allowed the capturing of contact details and sectoral representation of each individual who applied for a place. Not everyone who booked turned up at the event, and not everyone who turned up at an event had booked, but usually these discrepancies cancelled each other out.



“It’s events like this that bring people together. You get that sense of being able to share stories, share ideas, share initiatives and find out more about what’s actually going on. We all think we know what’s going on in our region – but we actually don’t”

Cathy Agnew, Dumfries & Galloway LEADER

Attendance at the events varied from 121 in Forth Valley & Lomond to 13 in Shetland, with an average attendance of around 50. Following the Forth Valley & Lomond event, which had an unexpectedly high attendance of 121, consideration was given to capping the number attending subsequent events at 100. In the event, this proved unnecessary.

The total number of people who attended the events was just over 1,000. The demographic and sectoral breakdown is shown in the table below. It is noteworthy that more than three quarters of those attending were over 40 years old, and only a handful were under 25.

“These types of events are absolutely imperative for the rural community.”

Teresa Dougall, Scottish Rural Property & Business Association

Number of Events	20
Total number attending	1005
Main area of work or voluntary activity	%
Arts, Culture & Heritage	19.8
Community Development	48.5
Community Facilities	26.5
Enterprise	16.8
Environment and Biodiversity	23.6
Farming	9.6
Fisheries	2.0
Food	7.0
Forestry and Woodland	11.7
Learning and Skills	18.6
Other	15.9
Renewables	14.0
Rural Services	18.4
Social Enterprise	20.1
Sports and Leisure	10.7
Tourism	18.8
Youth	11.4
Age range	%
Under 21	0.4
21-24	1.6
25-40	19.9
41-54	41.5
55 and above	36.5

Marketing

The main contacts for marketing were the local LAG and RPAC representatives, and email flyers and booking forms were sent out via their mailing lists. All events were promoted on the SNRN website and in the Rural Network News email newsletter, and links to these stories were circulated to other organisations and individuals, both locally and nationally. Media releases were issued for six of the events, but only picked up in two instances (Orkney and Borders).

Agenda

The basic event agenda was agreed at an early stage and with three exceptions was adhered to throughout the programme. It consisted of a series of presentations in the morning, giving information updates on SRDP funding and the Scottish National Rural Network as well as good practice examples of successful local projects.

The afternoon consisted of facilitated networking and discussion sessions, based on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry⁵, which uses a positive approach to look at what's going well as a way of solving problems and generating new ideas.

The evaluation results show that all elements of the agenda were viewed positively by most of those who responded, with highest scores usually being given to the information updates and the project presentations which were, with very few exceptions, judged to be of a high standard.

The afternoon discussion sessions were viewed with scepticism by some partners, some of whom expressed preferences for a more traditional thematic workshop format, and by some event participants. However, they generally worked well and undoubtedly succeeded in getting people talking to and making connections with a much wider range of people than they might have otherwise. This was apparent anecdotally on the day and also in the evaluation forms specific to these sessions.

⁵ Appreciative Inquiry can be defined as is a positive-focused approach, which looks at what's going right in order to solve problems. See http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_85.htm

One learning point related to the occasions when local contacts such as council or LEADER staff said that there was little need for networking because “everyone knows everyone else here”. It was apparent from the evaluation results that this was much less true than they believed, and that people were making genuinely new contacts which they wished to follow up. For example in one area, where this view was expressed by senior Council staff, the results showed that those who took part in the facilitated discussion session met an average of 15 new people, eight of whom they wanted to have longer conversations with.

Event follow-up

Reports of all the events and copies of the presentations delivered were posted on the Rural Network website, usually within a week of the event taking place. The video of the Aberdeenshire event was posted ten days after the event and the remaining videos were uploaded as a group in early August 2010.

Emails were sent to those who attended the events alerting them to the event reports on the website and to the uploading of the videos, and asking them to complete the evaluation survey.

Evaluation

Evaluations were carried out by issuing paper survey forms at the end of each event. The results from the evaluation are substantive and significant, but with a lower response rate than in later years, when an online survey was used. A further evaluation survey was sent out at the end of the year by email to 668 people who had attended the events. It elicited 84 responses, a 12.5% response rate.

Of those who responded:

- ▶ 35% had followed up contacts made at the event
- ▶ 18% are working in partnership with new people as a result of attending the event
- ▶ 21% are applying for funding as a result of attending the event
- ▶ More than 50% said they had shared experience with others and/or used information gained at the event to support their work.

These responses, combined with the results of the evaluation forms at the events, provide strong evidence of the impact of the networking that took place at the events. The survey also asked people for their views on what themes should be addressed during the second year’s events, and the top choices were:

- ▶ Renewable energy
- ▶ Village halls and community buildings
- ▶ Enterprise
- ▶ Tourism
- ▶ Community co-operatives

There was a strong interest in further networking, along with requests for more specific kinds of knowledge exchange and information-gathering opportunities.

Conclusions

The organisation and delivery of the first year of the SNRN Regional Co-ordination Service contract achieved its primary aim of successfully running 20 events across rural Scotland, working with local stakeholders and attracting a range of participants from the local area. The basic format of the events proved to be successful and evaluations were very largely positive. The results from the evaluation forms completed on the day and the online survey provide clear evidence that the events have had a significant impact in terms of information exchange, new working relationships and partnerships, and new funding applications.

Key learning points from the first year included the need for more targeted marketing and communications strategies and more effective evaluation procedures, as well as the need to avoid running too many events in too short a time, with consequent stresses on workload and capacity.



RURAL NETWORK EVENTS 2010-2013: THEMES AND VISITS

At the end of the first year of regional events, it was agreed that simply repeating the format for another year would not be the best use of resources. Instead, a new approach was developed, combining two different kinds of event, which continued for the next three years of the programme.

Thematic events were usually organised in partnership with another organisation with a specialist interest in a particular issue, activity or sector relevant to life in Scotland's rural communities. They were run as small conferences

or seminars, with as much time as possible made available for both formal and informal networking.

Project Visits took groups of around 10 like-minded people with a shared interest in a particular aspect of rural development to visit a host project where ideas and experiences were shared, and new networks and relationships formed.

The demographic and sectoral breakdown for people attending these events is shown below.

	Totals
Number of Events	28
Total number attending	925
Main area of work or voluntary activity	%
Arts, Culture & Heritage	18.7
Community Development	52.6
Community Facilities	41.2
Enterprise	16.6
Environment and Biodiversity	18.3
Farming	9.2
Fisheries	2.6
Food	13.2
Forestry and Woodland	9.0
Learning and Skills	19.8
Other	13.9
Renewables	16.5
Rural Services	21.1
Social Enterprise	23.2
Sports and Leisure	11.0
Tourism	19.9
Youth	18.4

Age range	%
Under 21	1.9
21-24	2.2
25-40	20.2
41-54	36.1
55 and above	39.6



“I have found it hugely beneficial talking to likeminded people and finding out lots of ideas of how other people are operating”

Belinda Rowlands, Easter Anguston Farm

Thematic events 2010-2013

Eleven thematic events were organised and delivered, with almost 800 people attending. The topics for these were decided largely on the basis of the survey conducted at the end of the first year's event programme and on continuing consultation with rural stakeholders.

In each case, one or more specialist organisations were approached to act as expert partners in the running of the event. This approach was, with one exception, successful and the organisations involved saw the benefits of working with skilled, experienced and well-networked event organisers. The partner contributions ranged from detailed co-operation over the

“Very worthwhile gathering, we could have filled that room ten times over... What a fantastic day we've had, absolutely brilliant, I've loved every minute of it”

Shirley Spears, Three Chimneys Skye

development and organisation of the event to simple advice and contributions to the agenda.

The thematic topics of the events and the organisations who acted as partners are shown below. The only theme that was duplicated was around village halls, although the emphasis of each event was different.

Event theme	Partner organisation(s)
Care farming	Care Farming Scotland
Green tourism in rural Scotland	Green Tourism Business Scheme
LEADER networking	South of Scotland LEADER Local Action Groups
Renewable energy in rural Scotland	Royal Society of Edinburgh & Community Energy Scotland
Rural community ownership	Development Trusts Association Scotland
Rural community transport	Community Transport Association
Small rural enterprise	Plunkett Scotland
Taste for tourism	Cairngorms National Park and Scotland Food & Drink
Village halls and community facilities	Scottish Agricultural College
Village halls and community buildings	SCVO KeyStone
Young people in rural communities	Carnegie UK Trust and Comrie Extreme Sports Group

Evaluation

The evaluations of these events was conducted online, with participants receiving a follow up email within two days of the event containing a link to the survey.

The great majority of responses were very positive. People were asked to rate the success on a score of 1 to 5 with 1 being Very unsuccessful and 5 being Very successful. For all the events the average score was between 4 and 5.

“It's been a really useful and productive day, seeing so much enthusiasm across the rural sector for these kinds of projects”

Jamie Adam, Community Energy Scotland

When people were asked to rate the usefulness of the event, the scores were once again, in all but two cases, between 4 and 5. The two exceptions had an average score of 3.9.

PROJECT VISITS 2010-2013

The decision to run smaller scale events with a limited number of people was partly based on a paper called 'Transferring Models: the study trip as a tool'⁶ by Jukka Oksa and Esko Lehto from the Karelian Institute at the University of Joensuu in Finland. This was written following their participation in international study trips from Finland to Scotland in 2005, in which SCVO staff were also involved, and some of their ideas and conclusions informed the development of the SNRN project visit model.

This model was based on the belief that, while a lot can be gained from watching a presentation about a project, or hearing about it from someone else, nothing beats visiting a place for yourself so that you can see what happens and how things are done 'on the ground'.



The other key consideration was that the dynamics of networking and knowledge exchange within the group on a visit would be as important as, or even more important than, the information received during the visit.

Once the themes for the first round of visits had been agreed, it was necessary to identify hosts for the events. The aim was to find projects and organisations who could welcome people to their area, show them what they are doing, and provide a safe and supportive environment for some discussions and the sharing of ideas and experiences.

Several key factors we considered in the planning of the project visits:

1. **Geography** The event had to be as accessible as possible for people across rural Scotland while also reflecting its diversity. Every effort was made to fit in with people's travel needs.
2. **Length of visit** The event had to provide a decent amount of time for people to build relationships and have good discussions, but at the same time not take them away from

their home and work for an unrealistic amount of time.

3. Numbers

The number of people attending each event would need to fit with the capacity of the host project's venue and facilities, the optimum number of people for relationship building and high quality and the event budget, taking into consideration any travel, accommodation and catering.



The format that was agreed on, and that continued through the following three years had the following key features:

• Ten people per visit

This would prevent there being too many people to allow for effective discussion (especially once you include the host team too) but would also fit within our budget.

• Welcome dinner and overnight stay

To support with travel arrangements, and encourage relationship building, the visit begins the evening before the host tour and provided an evening meal, overnight accommodation and breakfast as part of the event.

• A closing lunch the following day

To give a final opportunity for networking and exchange of contacts, but primarily so the afternoon could be used for travelling back home.

The schedule for the visits was as follows:

Day 1. Welcome dinner and overnight accommodation

Day 2. Host project tour
Host project Q&A
Facilitated discussion
Closing lunch

⁶ <http://goo.gl/pYWy3M>

Each project visit was publicised on the SNRN website and through other relevant networks. Potential participants were asked to explain their reasons for wanting to attend and these, along with other criteria such as achieving a geographical spread of participants, were used to help allocate places when more than ten people applied.

The selection process was intended to ensure that individual participants were the people who would get most benefit from the visit, that the mix of participants meant there were people at different stages of project development and experience, and that different parts of the country were involved. Because of the different types of projects and participants, it was not possible to apply one set of strict criteria.

Instead, the selection was usually based on an initial sifting by the Co-ordinator, which was then subject to review by the Project Manager.

Seventeen project visits took place involving a total of 149 people. The topics and locations are shown below:

“It’s very humbling for us to share the knowledge that we’ve got, built up over the years and that people actually appreciate that... It’s been an absolute pleasure to host people on Arran, and as a proud islander, hopefully they’ll all come back as tourists as well.”

Alastair Dobson, Taste of Arran

Project visit topic	Project visit location
Care Farming	Easter Anguston Farm, Aberdeenshire
Community Enterprise	Castle Douglas, Dumfries & Galloway
Community Events & Festivals Project Visit	Cromarty, Highland
Community Retailing	Kirkmichael, Perthshire
Community Right to Buy	Neilston, East Renfrewshire
Community Transport	Badenoch & Strathspey, Highland
Community Woodland	Abriachan, Highland
Environment and Renewables	Comrie, Perthshire
Environmental Improvements	Forth & Clyde Canal, Croy, North Lanarkshire
Food and drink	Arran, North Ayrshire
Paths and People	Oatridge Campus, West Lothian
Services for Older People	Assynt, Highland
Social Enterprise (employability)	Twechar, East Dunbartonshire
Village Halls and Community Buildings	Boat of Garten, Highland
Village Halls and Community Buildings	Whitsome, Scottish Borders
Wildlife Tourism	North Berwick, Scottish Borders
Young, Gifted and Rural	Cumnock, East Ayrshire

Evaluation

The online evaluation survey sent to each participant asked them to rate aspects of the events as Excellent, Good, Average or Poor. At every event, more than 90% of those attending rated every aspect of the visits as either Excellent or Good.

Positive comments included:

- ▶ *Highly worthwhile and really useful.*
- ▶ *Inspiring and well organised.*
- ▶ *An excellent experience and well organised.*
- ▶ *Pretty much a perfect event.*
- ▶ *By far, the best visit I have had in the last two years.*
- ▶ *Would be difficult to better – but I'd love you to try!*
- ▶ *Fantastic networking – lots of useful connections were made.*
- ▶ *Refreshing and motivational.*
- ▶ *SNRN have amazing organisational skills, very well done, very thorough.*
- ▶ *A really interesting and insightful couple of days.*
- ▶ *It was carried out in a very friendly, open and positive way.*
- ▶ *The event was faultless.*
- ▶ *It is not often that one has the opportunity to meet with such a range of diverse individuals to discuss a topic close to all of their hearts.*

Constructive criticism included:

- ▶ *Gave me some enthusiasm and energy but issues were so different to our own.*
- ▶ *We need to think of ways of maintaining the momentum established by the visits rather than seeing them just as a learning opportunity.*
- ▶ *It would have been useful to have had a bit of blurb about each delegate's project prior to the event.*
- ▶ *The meal was fantastic but I would have sacrificed it for a more basic buffet in a situation where we could all really mingle and talk.*
- ▶ *You should flag up the small number (of attendees) as a real benefit.*

“Today was a fantastic event. It was really important for all of these people to meet together, and I think the networking opportunity for us was really good.”

Maggie Lawson, Badenoch & Strathspey Community Transport Company



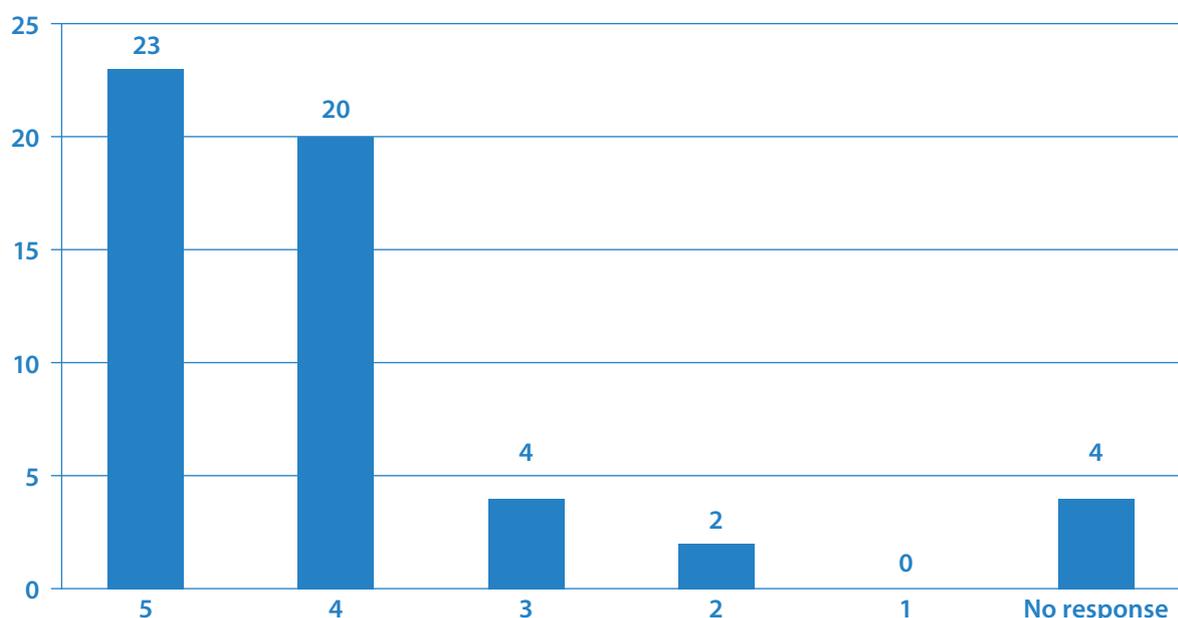
DID THE SNRN ACTIVITIES HAVE A LASTING IMPACT?

At the end of the events programme, in September 2013, a further survey was conducted of people who attended a sample of three thematic events and three project visits in the previous two years. The intention was to explore whether they felt there had been any lasting impact from their experience of the event.

53 people completed the survey, constituting a 26% response rate.

The following tables summarise the responses to the key questions:

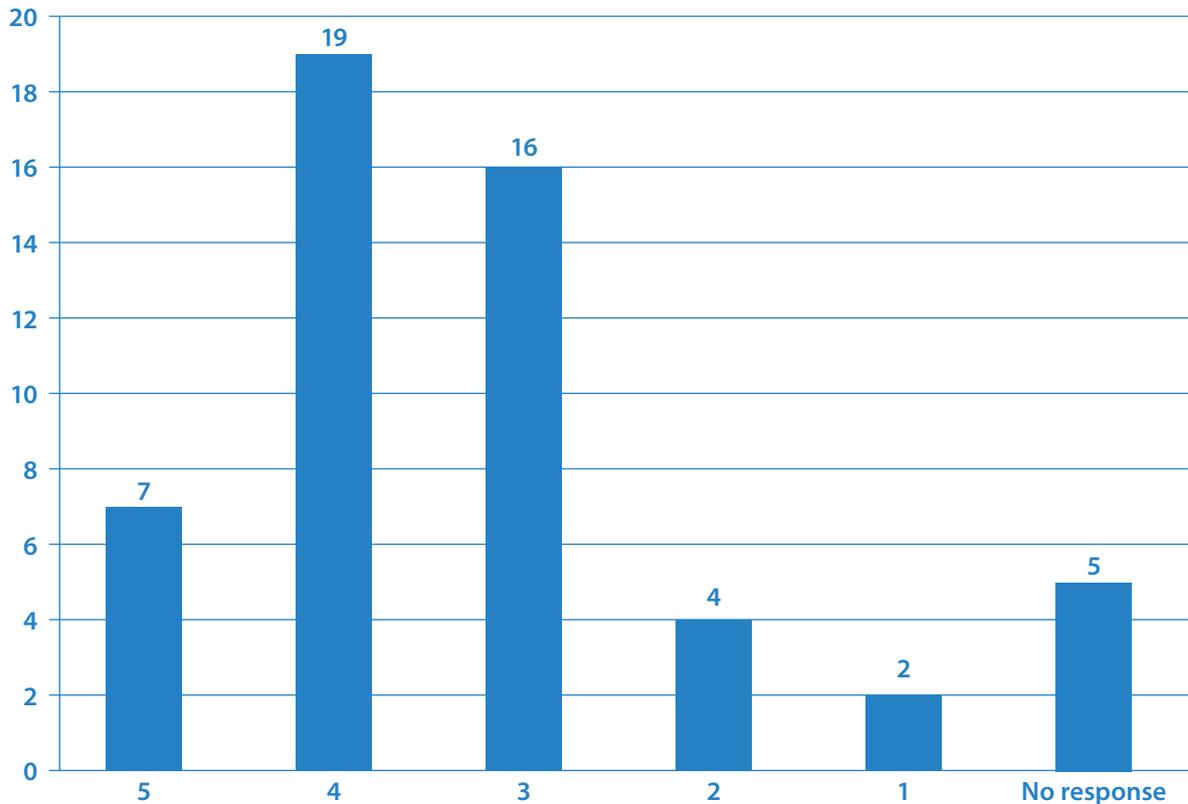
Looking back on the Rural Network Event you took part in, how would you rate it on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all useful' and 5 is 'Very useful'



Supplementary comments included:

- ▶ *This was an excellent event with very good networking opportunities.*
- ▶ *Great networking event – in rural areas one tends to become blinkered and such events allow considerable exchange of ideas.*
- ▶ *Our Shared amenity, East Whins House, is now up and running and a lot of advice and information from the event has been relevant and useful.*
- ▶ *It was a great opportunity for people to network. We learnt from others around the country and developed links which were useful in the longer term.*
- ▶ *... it enabled me to meet others in similar but different organisations to me and it broadens your vision and ambitions for your own community. Makes you feel less alone and stressed!*
- ▶ *The event (as with other similar ones previous to 2011) gave our community plenty of food for thought, advice and the benefit of experiences from other communities. Networking opportunity was excellent. Great information and presentations.*
- ▶ *The event was enjoyable and helped solidify ideas, but I'm not sure I learnt much that was new.*
- ▶ *Very well organised. Clear travel directions. Wonderful opportunity to talk with people who are doing similar and/or different things in different parts of the country. Excellent speakers all happy to share, be open and answer questions.*
- ▶ *It was inspirational to see how a small project could grow into something so empowering for the community.*

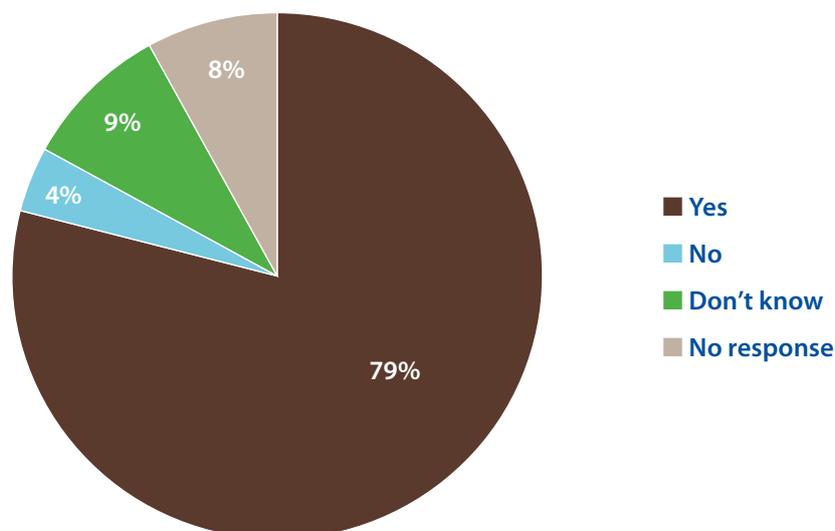
How much difference did attending the Rural Network Event make to you and your work. Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is 'No difference' and 5 is 'A very big difference'



Supplementary comments included:

- ▶ *It made feel empowered to return to my community and put forward arguments about new ways of working or wider visions for the community because I knew it had worked in other areas.*
- ▶ *It was one of the sources that helped rebuild our community hall.*
- ▶ *Mainly the networking and staying in contact – this has allowed us to develop our own projects in a more strategic and informed way.*
- ▶ *It gave me a new perspective and also made me feel less that there are lots of others like us.*
- ▶ *It helped a great deal to know how the products from Arran were marketed & distributed, etc but it did not make the work that had to be done at this end any less.*
- ▶ *Raised my awareness, but again, limited suitability with regard to location, client base and suitable options available for inclusion.*
- ▶ *From the discussions/meetings and talking to people I obtained ideas which I have put into practice within the organisation.*
- ▶ *As yet not had the opportunity to develop ideas that came from that event. However it did open my eyes to possibilities, I found it to be interesting and encouraging to hear of exciting projects that had been developing both from the speakers and those on the information stands.*
- ▶ *There was not enough follow-up or time spent in deciding on follow-up actions.*

Would you be interested in attending further events like these as part of the new Scottish National Rural Network?



Supplementary comments included:

- ▶ *I would be interested in further events, especially if further funding came through for this type of project.*
- ▶ *We are an ongoing project, and obviously funders are changing views, and just talking to others who have been through the process helps enormously.*
- ▶ *Sometimes networking events prove disappointing. I can honestly say that this was one of the best I have attended over the last four years. A lot of care had gone into the planning as well as those attending. Everybody felt they got a lot of value from being there.*
- ▶ *The young gifted and rural events were enjoyed by the young people I work with. Unfortunately the last one planned did not take place and there was nothing set up to follow on from the meetings which were held.*
- ▶ *Yes, I have found all the events so far very useful.*
- ▶ *Very worthwhile and I hope they do continue as I and my fellow board members would be keen to participate.*
- ▶ *Keep up the good work, and more of the same!! Different location next time!!!*
- ▶ *I have always gained a lot from these events.*
- ▶ *The people who have attended in the past find them useful and these events form a catalyst for further improvement in an organisation.*
- ▶ *It must be continued for the sustainability of rural-based organisations.*
- ▶ *More effort should be spent on planning follow-up projects – maybe small staff sub-groups corresponding via lync or video conference between larger meetings. These could then support similar themed working groups of young people or community reps.*
- ▶ *Thought everyone was welcoming and willing to share ideas. Great to meet the person who runs/maintains the Rural Network News, which is a very useful online publication.*

Other comments included the following:

- ▶ *I have recommended the Rural Network to other individuals and organisations and may use it again in the future myself.*
- ▶ *They should be continued in much the same style as they have been – the value gained from them is huge allowing otherwise disconnected rural communities to benefit from existing examples rather than simply inventing a new wheel.*
- ▶ *Make them as varied as possible both geographically & in subject matter so as to appeal to a maximum number of delegates.*
- ▶ *Very good to get away for the day and take stock, hear of new funding streams, talk to others in similar positions and share good working practice. You learn a lot by chatting at the tea breaks!*

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Rural Network events were not an attempt to build a comprehensive cross-sectoral network in rural Scotland. They were aimed at providing people in rural Scotland with a range of opportunities to share knowledge, make connections and build networks relevant to their interests and locations, and to contribute to the vibrancy, sustainability and success of Scotland's rural communities.

On the evidence of many conversations and the overwhelming majority of the evaluation responses, they are widely perceived as having been a success. While it is notoriously difficult to measure the economic and social impacts of this kind of intervention, there can be no doubt that

the programme of events inspired many people working in rural communities, connected them with others who were seeking to achieve similar goals and succeeded in its goal of promoting economic growth and community empowerment and, in the words of the original proposal, getting rural people speaking to each other and working together in the best interests of all parts of rural Scotland.

It is also clear that there is a huge appetite for more of these events, and it is to be hoped that this kind of networking and knowledge exchange is included in the new Scottish Rural Network for 2014-2020.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first year of the Scottish National Rural Network Regional Events Programme was developed and co-ordinated by Beverley Maclean.

In year 2, Matt Tyrer covered for maternity leave, launching the second phase of events, before Beverley returned for the third and fourth year of the Programme.

Norette Ferns, Editor of the Rural Network website also played a key role in most of the events, helping with organisation and delivery as well as making sure they were comprehensively covered on the Rural Network website.

All three of them, and many other SCVO staff, including members of the Rural Direct team, worked extremely hard and did an extraordinary job of delivering a range of very successful events across a wide range of topics, working with many different partners and often in challenging circumstances. They have a lot to be proud of.

Parts of this document are based on reports written by Matt Tyrer and Beverley Maclean.

Norman MacAskill
Head of Rural Policy, SCVO

This report was produced for the Scottish Government by the Rural Team of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. For further information, please contact:

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For copies of the report and more information about the Scottish National Rural Network 2008-2013, visit the Rural Network website

www.ruralgateway.org.uk

For information about the Scottish Government's plans for the new Scottish Rural Network, please contact:

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