

LEADER Transnational Cooperation

A Practical Guide

Disclaimer

The text of this publication – and its annexes (the ‘tools’) – has been prepared for information purposes only and is not legally binding. The tips included in this practical guide are mainly for Local Action Groups (LAG) planning to implement transnational cooperation (TNC) projects but can also be useful for other LEADER stakeholders. The publication has been prepared by the EU CAP Network’s CAP Implementation Contact Point and its content does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.



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TNC – A Practical Guide

This LEADER Transnational Cooperation (TNC) practical guide aims to provide advice and tips for planning and implementing LEADER TNC projects under the 2023-2027 CAP Strategic Plans (CSP). The guide is complemented by the LAG Directory and TNC Member State factsheets, available on the [LEADER section of the EU CAP Network website](#).

The first chapter of this practical guide describes what constitutes a TNC project, its key benefits and the main characteristics that make a ‘good’ TNC project. The second and main chapter of the practical guide provides an overview of TNC projects step-by-step, starting from the very early stages of considering a TNC project, through the implementation of preparatory actions to the realisation of the actual project. This chapter also describes the basics of project evaluation and communication.



A [glossary of relevant terms](#) and a short summary of EU level regulations relevant for TNC are presented below.

1.1.1. The ‘tools’ in this guide

The tools referred to in this guide provide further information and practical examples. The use of these tools is optional and can be seen in the Annex at the end of this document.

1.1.2. Member State/region specific TNC rules

Each Member State has specific requirements regarding the preparation and implementation of TNC projects. For rural stakeholders implementing TNC projects, it is very important to be aware of the rules regarding their own CSP, as well as the rules affecting their partners’ TNC actions. The EU CAP Network provides continuously updated information on LEADER TNC rules at the individual CSP level in the form of TNC Factsheets. You can find official information about all of the CSPs of Member States and regions on the [Country data section](#) of the EU CAP Network website as well as a [dedicated section on the Commission’s Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development \(DG AGRI\) website](#).

Preface

Cooperation between local areas in Europe offers a multitude of benefits to participating local communities, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and other local stakeholders. It can strengthen local and European identities by helping partners discover their own values from the perspective of others and learn to appreciate differences and similarities as valuable resources through mutual cooperation. Cooperation can also improve the competitiveness of participating rural territories by enhancing links between businesses, achieving a ‘critical mass’ for the introduction of new methods and approaches, which strengthens the innovative character and effectiveness of local development. Last but not least, cooperation contributes to implementing the Local Development Strategy (LDS) and meeting local needs – it needs to be done with the intention of solving real issues and improving local territories.

This practical guide builds on earlier work and useful TNC guidance materials prepared by the National Rural Networks and the European Network for Rural Development during the 2014-2020 programming period. It also takes into account the new legal framework of LEADER in the 2023-2027 programming period, as well as updated information from Member States where available and relevant. This practical guide is primarily a tool for LAGs intending to start transnational cooperation. It also contains useful information for other local stakeholders active within LAGs or Managing Authorities (MAs) and National Networks (NNs).

The purpose of this practical guide is to:

- clarify what cooperation is and the benefits it can bring; and
- present a comprehensive step-by-step guide explaining the key concepts linked to planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of cooperation projects.

In the 2023-2027 programming period, LEADER is part of the ‘Cooperation’ type of intervention (Article 77 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115) programmed in Member States CSPs, and it includes support to the cooperation actions of LAGs. **The new legal provisions in the period aim to facilitate the cooperation projects by making LAGs exclusively responsible for publishing the calls for and selecting cooperation projects.** Likewise, there is no longer a separate budget for cooperation, as it is included in the implementation of LDS. However, some details of eligibility or other criteria may be established at the Member State level by the MAs. Such national (or, in some cases, regional) rules should always be consulted first, before undertaking any detailed preparation work on TNC projects. Understanding the CSP rules and procedures is one of the keys to successful project performance. The [TNC Factsheets](#) prepared by the EU CAP Network provide relevant information on Member State specific rules and eligibility criteria relating to TNC.



For the purposes of this guide, the text will concentrate on information relevant to transnational cooperation supported by CSPs funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Future updates of this practical guide will incorporate links to any new information received about the Member States' administrative rules and reflect the information needs of and feedback received from readers. Please send suggestions for new and useful material or general feedback on the guide to leader@eucapnetwork.eu. Your comments are warmly welcome! The [LEADER TNC section](#) of the EU CAP Network website provides further information and tools to support the preparation of TNC projects.

Glossary

CAP Strategic Plans (CSP)

EU countries implement the 2023-27 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) through tailored national CAP Strategic Plans ¹ targeting local needs and implementing any Specific Objective of the CAP: economic, social and/or environmental.

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)

An approach based on the experience of LEADER, involving a local partnership of public, private and NGO actors (LAGs) which develops and implements an LDS for a given territory. The CLLD approach, enshrined in the EU legislation, also encourages local innovation, networking and cooperation. Since 2014, CLLD can be used in four EU funds, currently: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), the European Social Fund plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Where CLLD is funded from EAFRD, the name LEADER is still used.

The legal provisions regarding the CLLD are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation 1060/2021 (Art 31-34).

Cooperation

In this guide, the term cooperation refers to transnational cooperation unless otherwise stated.

EU CAP Network

The Network is a forum through which NNs, organisations, administrations, researchers, entrepreneurs and practitioners can share knowledge and information (e.g. via peer-to-peer learning and good practices) about agriculture and rural policy. The European Commission set up the EU CAP Network in line with the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council (Article 126 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115) to support CSPs. The network supports the design and implementation of CSPs, innovation and knowledge exchange, including EIP-AGRI, and evaluation and monitoring of the CAP.

Good Practice database

A tool used for disseminating selected examples of good practices on the implementation of CSPs within the EU. The Good Practice database of the EU CAP Network is available here. National Networks may also have similar databases.

¹ More information about CAP Strategic Plans available at https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans_en.

Inter-territorial cooperation

Cooperation between two or more Local Action Groups or local stakeholders from LAG territories within the same Member State.

Local Action Group (LAG)

A broad-based local private-public partnership whose aim is to improve the long-term potential of the local area and that has the ability to define and implement a development strategy for the area. The LAG is selected to implement a LDS based on criteria set up at the programme level by the Managing Authority. LAGs are composed of representatives of public and private local socioeconomic interests.

Local Development Strategy (LDS)

A programming document drawn up and implemented by the LAG for a given area with a view to achieving the objectives which should contribute to the local development. It includes the description of the geographical area and population covered by that strategy, the community involvement process in the development of that strategy, an analysis of the development needs and potential of the area, the objective, targets and actions to achieve them, arrangements related to management, monitoring and evaluation, and a financial plan.

LEADER

From the French “Liaisons Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale” (Links between actions for the development of rural economy), LEADER is a method of rural development involving the decentralisation of decisions to the local community. It involves the creation of a local partnership (LAGs) which develops and implements an LDS based on the local needs and opportunities. LEADER is a precursor of CLLD. The LEADER approach under EAFRD is implemented through the Cooperation intervention, under Article 77 of the CAP.

LEADER intervention

An intervention under the ‘Cooperation’ intervention type of the CAP, funded through the EAFRD. Through each CSP, the Managing Authority has to decide how much funding to allocate to this intervention (respecting the minimum of 5% of the EAFRD allocation to the programme. It is mandatory to program LEADER under the CSPs. LEADER intervention lists the Specific Objectives of the CAP, to which it contributes alongside result indicators and targets. It also covers key principles of LEADER/CLLD, key eligibility conditions and financing.

Monitoring and performance

This activity is carried out during the implementation of each CSP, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority and each CSP Monitoring Committee, to monitor programme implementation. LAGs play an important role in the monitoring of the LEADER intervention (e.g. by providing information on the common indicators), and they are responsible for monitoring the implementation of their local strategy.

Monitoring is done according to common EU result indicators that follow policy performance. Member states plan to achieve clear targets and their performance against these targets is regularly assessed.

Managing Authorities (MA)

In charge of the management of the CSPs at national or regional levels.

National CAP Network (NN)

In the 2023-2027 programming period, in each Member State, the NN or CAP Network has a key role in steering and driving forward the CAP. NNs support the networking of organisations and administrations, advisors, researchers and other innovation actors, and other actors in the field of agriculture and rural development at national level.

Transnational Cooperation (TNC)

TNC means cooperation between LAGs or other local stakeholders from at least two Member States of which at least one is selected under the LEADER Intervention. TNC can also include cooperation between LAGs from the EU-27 with similar groups in third countries that follow a similar approach to LEADER.

1. Introduction

Transnational and/or inter-regional cooperation has become increasingly important for rural stakeholders as effective mechanisms for helping rural areas jointly develop new solutions to common issues. This can be seen as one of the added values of cooperation ².

In the context of LEADER, cooperation projects are similar to local projects in the sense that they contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the relevant LDS. However, due to the essential element of working with a cooperation partner external to the LAG territory, they also have additional benefits related to mutual learning and achieving critical mass in terms of relevant knowledge, experience and methods applied and other resources.

Substantial experience has been gathered during all previous implementation periods of LEADER - LEADER II (1994-1999), LEADER+ (2000-2006), LEADER Axis of RDPs (2007-2013) and LEADER implementation during the 2014-2020 programming period. In a nutshell, cooperation projects can help all parts of rural Europe to grow together. In the 2014-2020 period EU legislation enabled further possibilities of LEADER cooperation: LAGs supported under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) were able to cooperate with local groups using Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) from other EU funds, including the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). They could also implement cooperation projects with local groups applying an approach similar to CLLD from countries outside the EU. This offered LEADER LAGs a far greater potential for cooperation than ever before.

In the current programming period, under the CSPs, the selection of projects under the CLLD LDS – including transnational cooperation projects – has become the exclusive task of LAGs. Other details related to transnational cooperation can be defined and managed at the Member State level.

The table below provides a brief summary of EU regulations relevant to transnational cooperation.

² The ‘added value’ of cooperation in the context of this guidance refers to the ‘additional benefits’ that LEADER cooperation can bring. It is intended to have a broader meaning than the evaluation definition of assessing the added value of LEADER. More information on assessing the added value of LEADER can be found [here](#).

Regulation	Article/specific reference	Key theme
Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 (EAFRD Regulation)	<u>Art. 3 Definitions</u> (15) 'LEADER' means community-led local development referred to in Article 31 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.	Rules related to CLLD, as laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation, apply to LEADER.
Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation)	<u>Art. 31 Community-led local development</u> 2. The Member State shall ensure that community-led local development is: (...); (d) supportive of networking, accessibility, innovative features in the local context and, where appropriate, cooperation with other territorial actors.	Cooperation is part of CLLD.
Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation)	<u>Art. 33 Local Action Groups</u> 3. The following tasks shall be carried out exclusively by the Local Action Groups: (...) (c) preparing and publishing calls for proposals; (d) selecting operations and fixing the amount of support and presenting the proposals to the body responsible for final verification of eligibility before approval.	Preparing and publishing calls, as well as the selection of operations, is the exclusive task of Local Action Groups.
Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation)	<u>Art. 34 Support from Funds for community-led local development</u> 1. The Member State shall ensure that support from the Funds for community-led local development covers: (...) (b) the implementation of operation, including cooperation activities and their preparation, selected under the strategy.	Support from the EU funds covers cooperation activities selected under the LDS, as well as their preparation.
Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 (CAP Strategic Plans regulation)	<u>Art. 7</u> Indicators	Article 7 includes provisions on the indicators to be used in relation to the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans, with further details outlined in Annex I of the Regulation.
Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1475	<u>Art. 14</u> Data on LAGs and their activities for LEADER 1. The data on LAGs and their activities for LEADER referred to in Article 8, point (e), of this Regulation shall include	Annex VII of the EU Implementing Regulation defines the content of the data on LAGs and their activities to be reported by Member States.

	information on interventions implemented based on Article 77(1), point (b), of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115. 2. Detailed rules on the content of data on LAGs and their activities for LEADER are laid down in Annex VII.	
Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1475	<u>Annex VII</u> Rules on data on LAGs and their activities for LEADER referred to in Article 14(2) (...) Data related to the LAG's activities (...) (viii) L708: number of interregional cooperation projects implemented by the LAG ix) L709: number of transnational cooperation projects implemented by the LAG	Reporting information on LAGs' cooperation activities (number of interregional and transnational cooperation projects implemented by the LAG).

There is no separate budgetary planning for cooperation in 2023-27 CSPs. Cooperation projects are part and parcel of the overall budget for the implementation of local development strategies.

1.1. What is transnational cooperation?

Support for transnational cooperation (TNC) encourages and supports LAGs to undertake joint actions with other LAGs or a group taking a similar approach in another Member State or even a third country.



1.1.1. Joint Action

TNC projects should correspond to concrete actions with clearly identified deliverables, producing benefits for each territory involved. These actions must be 'joint' in the sense that they are being jointly implemented, and they benefit all the cooperating partners. The content of such joint actions may cover a range of different activities eligible under the rules of the relevant CSPs. Joint approaches allow LAGs from one area to contribute funding to a joint project with project activities happening in its own territory or its cooperation partner(s). The location of the project is not in principle a limiting factor if the LAG area benefits from the joint project actions. Be careful as some national/regional eligibility rules may specify otherwise.

Examples of eligible joint actions (subject to national rules for CSP implementation) may include capacity building or knowledge transfer via common publications, training seminars, the development of a joint website or other ‘products’, twinning arrangements (exchange of programme managers and staff) leading to the adoption of common methodological and working methods, the ‘piloting’ of new approaches (e.g. to rural tourism, branding, etc.) or investments, and the elaboration of a joint or coordinated development work.

The costs of joint actions are typically shared among the cooperation partners (common costs). However, joint actions have also been implemented without sharing their costs (common costs not specified). In such an arrangement, each cooperation partner may cover the costs of a certain, clearly defined element of the joint action(s).



1.1.2. Cooperation and networking

Cooperation concepts are often closely related to networking concepts since networking may foster cooperation, and cooperation may result in creating new thematic networks.

Networking is an activity that brings people (and their organisations) together around a common interest to undertake activities that are mutually beneficial to them.

Active networking can create relationships between people and organisations and generate new knowledge and, thus, cooperation opportunities.

Cooperation is a dynamic process!

Projects that start out as networking initiatives often end up becoming fully-fledged cooperation projects with tangible benefits and added value with regard to achieving LDS objectives.

Establishing a new network can also be seen as a joint action. Networking for the sake of networking is not generally considered as useful as networking with the purpose of implementing a specific rural development action.

TNC projects should therefore:

- address issues and themes important for the participating rural areas;
- contribute to achieving the objectives of the participating LAGs’ LDS;

- bring some significant added value to the participating LAG areas, the activities targeted, the actors involved or, more widely, the local population; and
- be implemented with well-defined and realistic objectives.

In order for tangible results to be achievable, the limits of the project need to be determined well in advance.

1.2. Why cooperate?

1.2.1. The benefits of TNC

Cooperation is one of the [basic principles of LEADER](#). It can provide local projects with alternative and novel opportunities to look for solutions to the problems of their areas. Cooperation projects can contribute to the implementation of LDS and local development in different ways. The following examples illustrate some of these.

Strengthening the territory and local partnerships

TNC projects should meet the needs and opportunities of CLLD areas and contribute to the objectives of the respective LDS of the cooperation partners. Getting to know other areas and other stakeholders, often facing similar types of issues, can strengthen the local partnership and encourage creative approaches to facing local challenges.



Example: [‘Coastal and Dune management’](#) – a TNC project between Estonia, Latvia, and Northern Ireland and Finland (lead partner). All partner areas have long coastlines, and each was actively looking at ways to find a balance between protecting the environment and opening up their areas to tourists in a sustainable way.

TNC can also help develop and strengthen partnerships through knowledge exchange between Member States and third countries, thus contributing to local development through public-private partnerships.



Example: [A network for regional development between Latvia and Moldova](#) – This TNC project supported regional development through knowledge exchange between Latvia and Moldova, particularly focusing on local public-private partnerships.

Making projects more ambitious by reaching critical mass

TNC can enable a project to achieve a greater critical mass; the total benefits can be much greater than the sum of individual achievements (1+1=11). Pooling resources and expertise can result in economies of scale and synergies, which are favourable to achieving project objectives (such as technical equipment/technologies, training, marketing, etc.).



Example: [Slow Trips](#), a cooperation project between LAGs from Austria, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Sweden. Slow Trips united partners from six Member States to communicate and market innovative tourism products characterised by sustainability and participation and to attract new target groups dissatisfied with superficial sightseeing. The focus of the project is on creating tourism products through the involvement of new suppliers and host groups, including farmers, craftspeople and those active in presenting and creating culture. The need for many small rural family businesses to diversify is achieving particular prominence due to challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The project partners worked on realigning existing tourism products, involving new local tourism providers and host groups in developing at least 15 new tourism products in each participating region. A Europe-wide bilingual (German/English) website presents the various Slow Trips products (B2C) and supports bookings.

Improving competitiveness: finding new business partners, positioning in new markets

Implementing a project with transnational partners can help the promotion of local products and the area of their origin. TNC may provide access to new business opportunities, hence generating a potential for: increased product sales; a complementary business partner to improve a product or process; and additional expertise. Rather than other areas representing potential competition, cooperation enables the partners to take advantage of complementarities and to benefit from similarities.



Example: [Global Eco-Inno Circular Economy in the Countryside](#) – A TNC project aligned with the EU's priorities in the European Green Deal involving partners from Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia and Portugal. Relevant topics and issues being covered through the exchange of best practices between the project partners include innovation in agriculture, waste management, biodynamic farming, renewable energy, green economy, forestry and the agri-food sector.

Supporting work and promoting innovation through new skills

New visions and new dimensions can support and promote new ways of working. Furthermore, exposure to transnational experiences can help broaden business horizons and encourage companies to adopt improved operational approaches. These in turn should generate knock-on socioeconomic and/or environmental benefits for rural areas.



Example: [Rural Working Hubs](#) – a TNC project involving LAGs from Ireland and Finland helped launch a network of rural teleworking hubs in Finland's southern Ostrobothnia region and involved cooperation with Ireland's Longford County LAG. The CAP funding was used as start-up support for hubs as well as related branding and sharing best practices through online capacity building events and publications. Eight new remote working hubs were launched in Finland. Best practices in working hub operating models were

defined and shared transnationally. Nationwide collaboration was established with Finnish operators of working hub spaces.

Strengthening territorial identity and highlighting the importance of local heritage

TNC can help local people and visitors alike discover the local territory and its cultural and historical heritage. Transnational interactions can help find innovative ways of meeting local-rural challenges regarding representing local territories and their heritage. This can lead to local actors becoming more open to representing their territory and thereby becoming true ‘ambassadors’ of their areas.



Example: Living museums – A TNC project between partners from Czechia and Spain used SMART technology to develop the automation of opening, video monitoring and closing of ethnographic museums, interpretation centres, cultural spaces and similar centres in rural areas that were closed due to the lack of resources. The automation concerns all the stages of the visit: request to enter the centre, identification of the visitors, opening of the buildings, follow-up of the visit and closing of the facilities. This technology helped keep these centres open seven days a week, 24 hours a day, introducing a new concept of the tourist visit. The project was based on the success of a previous LEADER project (2018-2019), which involved seven Spanish LAGs and resulted in the reopening of 19 small museums and cultural centres through a web-based platform.

Improving local responses to global challenges (e.g., climate change, migration, etc.)

TNC projects can also contribute to developing more effective responses to global challenges affecting local rural areas with relatively limited resources. Cooperation can contribute to the better use of these resources.



Example: Exchanging good practices on integrating immigrants in rural areas across the EU – A TNC project with partners from Austria, Finland and Sweden helped partners better understand immigrants’ and refugees’ challenges and develop good practices for their integration in rural areas. Increasing numbers of immigrants are arriving in Europe from areas of conflict. Rural areas, particularly those with declining populations, have an opportunity to integrate refugees. International networks are needed to exchange best practices, advice and support in developing new integration projects for immigrants.

1.2.2. The ‘soft benefits’ of TNC

A number of ‘softer’, often intangible, benefits can also be gained from cooperation work, as described in the following sections.

1.2.3. Broadening one’s mind by considering differences as a source of enrichment

Working with a transnational partner offers the potential to discover new or alternative points of view and to become aware of different peoples' visions. It can help the local stakeholders look at their area with 'new eyes' and strengthen their capacity to innovate.

Developing European citizenship and sense of identity

A TNC project can provide an opportunity to raise awareness about EU actions and European citizenship among the local population. It is a way to identify and present the local area's place within Europe.

Acquisition of new skills

Implementing a TNC project often involves gaining new expertise about specific development methodologies or techniques. They often involve learning new language skills. Cooperation actions can therefore represent effective capacity building approaches for rural stakeholders.

1.3. What makes a good TNC project?

TNC projects are quite diverse in nature, but some common TNC success factors exist that can help ensure good cooperation projects. These include:

- **Following a territorial approach.** LEADER supports 'territorial cooperation' between LAGs and other local stakeholders; TNC projects should fit well with each LAG's LDS. Projects should address challenges in LAG areas in order to ensure their relevance and added value.
- **Having a strong and clear project idea** which contributes to the realisation of the objective(s) of the LDS. A general topic, even if adapted at a later stage with the partners, may fail to provide such a contribution. The LAGs' key local challenges should also be reflected in the choice of themes for TNC projects. The most popular of these themes over the years have consistently related to rural tourism, local culture, rural innovation and businesses, social inclusion, rural services, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Smart villages, intended as communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities, are also an important subject of cooperation.
- **Identifying the right cooperation partners.** Even if the cooperating LAGs come from very different regions of Europe, they must share common objectives and a common vision of the results they are trying to achieve. There should also be some degree of similarity between the local challenges they are facing and hoping to meet with the aid of a TNC project.
- **Going beyond simple exchanges.** TNC projects ideally go beyond a simple exchange. They should include common actions which create

tangible results. Concrete and common actions (like joint acquisition of technology, creation of common events or products, joint experimentation/piloting, etc.) are effective ways to find answers to the challenges of cooperating areas.

- **Planning properly for human resources.** The development, coordination, implementation and management of a TNC partnership and project can be demanding. Human resource requirements need to be carefully considered from the early stages of project development.
- **Building a strong partnership.** Throughout the life cycle of a TNC project, it is beneficial to:
 - **define the profile** of your desired partner(s) to make the partner search easier;
 - **negotiate and distribute roles and responsibilities** between the partners while developing the project (and include these in the partnership agreement); and
 - **maintain and manage the partnership** during the implementation of the TNC project.

2. TNC step by step

Due to some additional steps in their overall life cycle and differences in implementation frameworks between Member States, TNC projects tend to be more complex than other rural development projects.

This part of the guide takes readers through each of the main steps involved in TNC: getting ready to start cooperation, preparatory actions, implementing TNC projects, and evaluating and communicating their results.



2.1. Getting ready to start

A LAG which is interested in starting a cooperation activity needs to:

- Make sure that the cooperation activity addresses actual local needs as identified in its LDS.
- Identify people in the area who must be involved and speak the languages which are needed.
- Ensure there is support for TNC and involvement in the local community.
- Identify – at least tentatively – potential cooperation partners with whom it could jointly explore the future TNC through preparatory actions.

2.1.1. Ensuring community support and involvement

Before taking the decision to cooperate – or select a cooperation project proposed by one of the local stakeholders in its territory – the LAG should always consider its LDS and see what local needs or opportunities can be addressed through TNC (most of this can happen at the stage of LDS formulation). Once such needs are identified and before launching a TNC project, several baseline actions are advised at the level of each partner LAG. These help ensure that the project starts on a sound foundation. In some Member States, local stakeholders can formally be beneficiaries of a TNC project while in other Member States, only the LAG can formally be the beneficiary of a TNC project. However, even in this latter case, a strong involvement of other local actors is essential for the success of the cooperation.

This initial step should help:

- make local stakeholders aware of what benefits TNC can bring;
- identify TNC promoters and partners within the area;
- identify tangible TNC ideas which respond to the identified needs and opportunities.

Expected results from this process should be an informed group of stakeholders possessing knowledge about TNC and the opportunities that it offers and willing to be involved in or contribute to a TNC project. This group of supporting stakeholders should be as broad as possible and involve different types of actors.

Mobilising potential TNC project partners at the LAG level for this first step can be helped by setting up an informal working group or ‘TNC think tank’ of local people. The ‘think tank’ would be a discussion forum to identify and prioritise potential themes that TNC could focus on for the LAG area and to start collecting initial ideas of activities that could be carried out jointly with a transnational partner or partners. LAGs with a strong focus on TNC may have followed through with this process, or parts of it, during their strategy development stage.

Key points to getting started

- encourage local stakeholders to become interested in TNC;
- possibly create a local ‘TNC think tank’, and
- identify TNC ideas.

2.1.2. Preliminary identification of partners

Finding the right partner is one of the key success factors of a TNC project. You may achieve this by:

- identifying the desired characteristics of your potential partner;
- preparing a ‘cooperation advertisement/offer’;
- using partner search methods and tools; and
- responding to a cooperation offer from another LAG.

Identify the desired characteristics of a ‘good’ partner



Searching for a partner is not a question of chance. You should define the desired profile of your TNC partner and your expectations concerning the type of expertise and knowledge you are looking for. Such desired characteristics to consider when defining your TNC ‘partner’s profile’ might include:

- similarities in terms of characteristics and challenges of the area: physical (coastal, mountains...), historical (built heritage, ...), socioeconomic (predominance of small industries, ...), cultural (music, language, identity...)

characteristics;

- complementarity of expertise and experience;
- geographical location: proximity of territories (cross-border, LAG territories in neighbouring countries, etc.);
- existence of an ongoing partnership set up by a local actor; and/or
- language and other communications issues.

You should think about the size of the partnership and consider how many partners you are looking for. The answer depends on the objectives of your TNC project. Some projects may need a large partnership to be achievable. For others, a partnership between a smaller number of areas may be ideal.

A balance needs to be found to ensure that project partnerships are sufficiently large to be dynamic and provide sufficient benefits for all partners. However, care needs to be taken to avoid partnerships that may prove to be too large to manage and maintain and where mutual understanding may be hard to achieve.

Prepare an advert to attract potential cooperation partners



Drafting a ‘cooperation advert’ can be a good way of finding the right partner. The advert needs to include enough details to help readers understand your main cooperation interests. It should also indicate your willingness to discuss ideas from partners that might help add value to the TNC proposal.

Ideally, the advert should be able to sum up in a few short sentences:

- what it is you want to gain from the TNC project;
- how will this benefit the rural communities, businesses and/or environment in your area.

Use different methods to search for a partner



You should use a range of tools in order to increase your chances of success in your search for potential partners.

Before starting the search, remember...

- Your cooperation idea should be sufficiently specific to let others understand what you are looking for.
- You should take time to think about the profile of your ‘ideal’ partner.
- A partnership of only two partners is risky because the project will end if one partner decides to quit. Do not hesitate to contact more than one potential partner in order to increase your chances for success.

Partner search methods:



First, you should find out if there are already connections with other European areas in your LAG, e.g. through town twinning. These contacts are a good basis for a cooperation project, and you need less time to get to know the partner area.

Social media – If the LAG has its own social media account, which it uses to communicate with its stakeholders and other cooperation partners, this can be a useful way of spreading the message about the cooperation advert.

Mailing lists of various networks – LAGs looking for TNC partners may be part of/have access to mailing lists of various networks (e.g. several Member States have national LAG networks). Disseminating the cooperation advert through these mailing lists may also be a way to find potential partners.

Contacting your National Network may be another useful way to seek advice regarding TNC opportunities and spread the message included in your TNC advert/partner search offer. The EU CAP Network website includes [information on all National Networks](#).

Events – Participating in events is a good way to meet potential partners. Many events at European or national level support cooperation through special sessions or ‘cooperation corners’ (for EU level events, see the EU CAP Network website’s [event page](#)); there can also be special events dedicated to stimulating cooperation (cooperation fairs, or events such as the [ELARD LEADER Congress](#) or [LINC](#)). For relevant events organised at the Member State level, you may find it useful to contact your [National Network](#). A few preparations before the event or fair will help improve your chances of meeting the right partners. These include:

- **Before the event**, write down your cooperation idea (or a cooperation offer, if relevant), have a look at the other cooperation adverts, identify potentially interesting cooperation offers, organise a first contact with identified potential partners and agree a time and place to meet up with them, and prepare a presentation of your territory (using photos, maps, charts etc.).
- **During the event**, aim to arrange to meet with all your potential partners together.
- **After the event**, stay in contact with potential partners regularly during the project development phase. Do not lose contact with groups that do not immediately join the partnership since they may be useful for future cooperation work.

Participation in **thematic conferences** is another useful way to meet potential cooperation partners. You will meet rural actors who work on the same topics as you and this can lead to cooperation proposals.

How the EU CAP Network website can help

EU CAP Network LAG Directory – Here, you will find contact details for LAGs from across Europe. The directory currently has information from 23 Member States and is being added to as information is received from MAs. The LAG profiles indicate which themes the LAGs are working on. You can sort the [LAG Directory](#) by Member State and by theme. You will notice that there is a dedicated label included in the LAG’s profile to show if a LAG is actively looking for a cooperation partner or is interested in TNC.



EU CAP Network Partner Search Tool

LAGs could also post a ‘Transnational Cooperation Offer’ on [the EU CAP Network website](#), which hosts a dedicated TNC Partner Search Tool to help you find cooperation partners. By using the tool, LAGs can ‘post’ Transnational Cooperation Offers within your LAG profile in the EU CAP Network LAG Directory, find LAGs with active cooperation offers, and filter LAGs according to interest in specific cooperation themes and Member States. By posting an offer, a dedicated label will automatically be generated on your LAG profile to indicate you are looking for a cooperation partner or are interested in TNC. A user-friendly guide on the TNC Partner Search Tool webpage will give you full instructions on how to do this.



Further search tools and support for TNC may be available at both European and national levels. The support unit of your NN may also be able to help you find a TNC partner.

Responding to a cooperation offer

If you are approached for the purpose of becoming a TNC project partner, you need to think about several elements before reaching a decision:

- Is the TNC idea relevant to your cooperation objectives and/or LDS?
- Does the potential partner correspond to your partner profile?
- What are the similarities and complementarities?

Be aware!

Eligibility criteria and funding requirements for TNC actions may differ between Member States or regions. Always check what kinds of activities and costs are eligible for support for TNC projects. Do this as early as possible in the project development process. The [TNC Factsheets](#) available on the EU CAP Network website’s [LEADER TNC page](#) may provide useful information for this.

2.2. Preparatory actions

What you have already done at this stage:

- ✓ your local stakeholders are aware and mobilised
- ✓ you have defined your Transnational cooperation strategy
- ✓ you have identified your TNC ideas and partners
- ✓ you have your TNC idea(s)
- ✓ you have identified your potential partner(s)

Preparing a TNC project represents a transitional step between the cooperation idea and the implementation of the project. When preparatory support is available to finance activities that can help LAGs develop a cooperation project, such support may cover activities such as meetings, study visits, studies, expert support, etc. Rules and criteria related to the eligibility of preparatory actions may vary among Member States/regions.

This step should aim to:

- Get to know partner(s) with whom you are going to implement your project and their areas.
- Meet and/or discuss with your potential partner(s) to agree on the project aims, actions and work programme.
- Prepare a detailed description of the TNC project through a strong dialogue with partners.
- Clarify the eligibility criteria/funding rules for both your own and your partners' territories concerning expenditure eligibility for different project actions, legal and other restrictions on types of applicant or partners, as well as the application process requirements, deadlines and paperwork.

Expected results from this process should be:

- Partner(s) for the TNC project have been identified.
- a detailed description of the project has been prepared with all its components (aims, actions, work organisation, management modalities, budget, responsibilities, etc.).
- knowledge about different administrative rules and procedures.

The main phases involved in this step and advice about each phase are presented below.

Key points to preparing a TNC project:

- Meeting your partner(s) and agreeing to cooperate.
- Preparing a TNC application for funding.
- Negotiating the financial aspects of a cooperation project.
- Bringing together the required resources (knowledge and technical).
- Getting the financial, legal and administrative structures right.

2.2.1. Meeting your partner(s) and agreeing to cooperate

Although there are many ways of communicating with your (potential) cooperation partners, starting with an exploratory email, phone call, or online meeting(s) may help clarify the expectations and objectives related to the specific TNC offer and avoid potential misunderstandings early in the process. This also helps you decide whether to move on to the next stage (e.g., organising a planned online or face-to-face meeting). You may meet your potential cooperation partners for the first time in an online meeting, through social media, ad hoc during a seminar or conference, or in the frame of a pre-planned face-to-face meeting.

Face-to-face meetings and visits are essential for establishing good cooperation as they build trust between partners. Exchange visits between areas or actors with similar characteristics or resources are important to identify potential topics of mutual interest and joint learning opportunities.

Prepare and organise a meeting with your partner(s)



The first planned face-to-face meeting with your partner or partners should be carefully prepared to improve the chances of good results. Of course, more meetings may be needed (and they may take place in a different area or format).

Before the meeting:

- Do some structured preliminary work with partner(s). Share information about the situation and the challenges of your areas, as well as the outline of your cooperation project (clarify what you imagine, confirm what your partners imagine, and what you could do together). It can be useful to exchange documentation about the partners' areas and projects (sometimes, translation of such documents might be needed).
- Exchange views with the partner(s) about the agenda of the meeting. Agree on the working language. This first meeting is a crucial moment, and ideally, everybody should speak the same working language. If not, you should plan for interpretation. Dedicated interpreters are very useful and allow LAG staff to concentrate on the project rather than doing the interpretation themselves.
- Ensure that there is adequate time for informal exchange. Make it fun to be involved. This can be an important part of creating trust in the initial phases between future cooperation partners.
- Mobilise local stakeholders to attend this meeting, where their presence is relevant and possible.
- Decide the composition of your delegation. The ideal 'team' should include the LAG manager, representative of the LAG's technical team, project

promoter(s), LAG members and possible financial partners, as well as other 'counterparts' to the members of the other delegation (e.g. mayors or representatives of businesses, sectors relevant to the project from both/all partner territories).

- Identify a moderator for the meeting(s) and a person who will prepare the report of the meetings.
- Prepare a presentation of your territory's context, its challenges and the potential added value of the TNC project for your territory. Simple videos – even if recorded with a smartphone – can be more attractive than PowerPoint presentations and are easy to make.
- Organise small gifts, such as local products, to thank your partner(s).

During the meeting(s), you should envisage at least the following points:

- All participants introduce themselves.
- Presentations of each partner – territory, structure, administrative organisation, etc.
- Discussion about individual and common TNC objectives by each partner and what each of them expects from the TNC project.
- Define different roles and agree upon responsibilities between partners (including the 'lead partner'), the budget for each partner and common costs (if relevant), and the next steps.

After the meeting:

- Promptly prepare a draft report of the meeting(s)/visit(s). Send this to partners for comments and validation.
- Plan a report for the project's local stakeholders in your area to inform them about their (potential) partners. Photos and videos are useful for raising awareness about the partner territories.

Be aware!

- You may need to develop your TNC project and partnership in a series of meetings. In this case, the agenda of the meetings will be adapted to the specific stage you are at in your project development process.
- The costs of preparatory meetings could be covered by preparatory support to cooperation projects (depending on relevant rules in Member States). Whether you are using such support or other funding, be clear about who pays for what.
- You should discuss and agree with your partner(s) about the sharing of travel costs, accommodation, catering, interpretation, etc., prior to the meeting. This will avoid any misunderstandings.

Prepare and organise a study visit to or from your partner(s)



A study visit is an important method to understand how potential partners solve a specific problem or address a specific issue in their local environment.

If you visit your partners, you will find much of the advice provided above useful regarding preparation for a meeting with them. You should also remember to keep an open mind and try to understand the point of view of your partners.

If it is your turn to welcome your partner(s), you should plan specific actions:

- Propose an agenda to be agreed on by all partners before the meeting.
- Organise a guided tour of the territory and study visits (including visits to relevant projects, if possible) to help your partner(s) understand the characteristics and the challenges of your territory.
- Mobilise local stakeholders (including elected representatives) and involve them in the dynamics of cooperation.

Be aware!

Plan for informal visits and for time dedicated to each type of participant. When you and your partner are thinking about the programme of the visit, you should plan to:

- Combine workshops and informal activities for the partners – It is important for people to have time to meet and to get to know each other beyond the formal meeting. **They will be the ones working together.**
- To have moments specially dedicated for elected people, LAG managers and / or the person responsible for cooperation.

Confirm the partnership



It is important to conclude this stage at the end of the initial meeting/visit. Preparing a written report indicating the partners' initial commitments provides a useful means to confirm whether the partners can proceed with further work on the joint project. Such a document can also indicate who will be the lead partner and who will coordinate the writing of the TNC application.

Partnerships often produce a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to formalise and make explicit important agreements between partners. If required by the relevant national/regional rules, such an MoU, or a draft cooperation agreement (which will enter into force when the project is approved) can be an attachment to the application for funding.

2.2.2. Preparing a transnational cooperation application for funding

Following confirmation of the partners' willingness to develop a joint project, the next step involves applying for project funding. LAGs will normally apply for their own funding to the respective MA.



The tools which can help you:

- Checklist for meetings with partners (Tool 4)
- How to present your territory to your partner? (Tool 5)

In case of a TNC partnership including partners from third countries (candidate countries), partners are well advised to find out about relevant funding opportunities and procedures well in advance.

Applications can be prepared by the project team or by experienced external consultants. Please be sure to check which types of costs are eligible to be covered by the preparatory technical support for cooperation projects under your CSP and those of your partners.

Before starting to prepare your application, it is extremely important to agree with your partners about **what your project will achieve and how you will measure it**. You must keep in mind the following:

- All applications require details about the intended outputs and results – most ask for these to be quantified in terms of **targets**.
- Targets should not be viewed as a bureaucratic burden and should be used as a key management tool by the partnership to help it track its own performance.
- Targets can also include qualitative goals. The important point to note is that you will be required to report on all your targets and so you will need to have monitoring systems in place to track progress against targets.
- It is essential that these are agreed upon and established from the start of the project to track the full impact of all project actions.

One of the main success factors in drafting TNC funding applications is your understanding of the Member State specific rules/procedures about cooperation. It is advisable to know about the rules in both your own and your partners' territories. Such information can be found in the EU CAP Network [TNC Factsheets](#) on rules and eligibility criteria for TNC. It can be helpful to discuss further details about the rules and procedures that apply in their Member State with your potential partners.

Another success factor is making a clear presentation of your project proposal. An indicative list of important elements of this is presented below:

- Presentation of the structure and organisation of the partnership.
- Presentation of the lead partner's and other partners' territories.
- Common and individual objectives.
- Planned actions – transnational actions and, when relevant, local actions which will also be part of (and be financed by) the project.
- Expected results and added value offered.
- Monitoring and evaluation framework (including indicators).
- Calendar and timetable.
- Roles of the different partners.
- Project management structure (including reference to human resources and their experience).
- Financial aspects covering costs and resource requirements. Differentiate between costs borne individually by partners and common costs which cannot be attributed to a single partner only (such as a joint event or website). Clarify different partners' budget allocations. Plan your LAG's project-related expenditures to enable the smooth delivery of your project-related tasks. Consider contingencies, e.g. if different/non-fixed currency exchange rates are involved.
- The communication strategy (targeting internal and external groups).

It is advisable to work together with your partner(s) on the content of the application form(s) and agree on the final content with all partners before submission for project selection by the local action groups. Such a procedure helps to ensure ownership of the project by all partners and encourages consistency across the partners' different funding applications. Endorsement of the lead application by all partners may require translations of the text, which should be budgeted for.

Complementary documents and adaptations might also be required (i.e. letters of intent and/or of commitment of the different partners, etc.), so make sure to attach all the required elements when submitting your application form.

A signed cooperation agreement may also be required at this stage. In such cases, all the partners may need to prepare and sign such an agreement before submitting the application.

Be aware!

Ensure and allocate sufficient time to produce/complete your application form – do not wait until the last moment! TNC applications take time to complete since they need to be written and then approved by your partner(s). Consider not only the time needed for LAGs to select the TNC projects, but also the time it may take for relevant national or regional CSP authorities to approve the projects (information on this is available in the [TNC Factsheets](#) in the EU CAP Network website) or can be obtained from the relevant authorities or NNs.

2.2.3. Negotiating the financial aspects of a cooperation project

Financial aspects of TNC projects are quite unique since these projects combine different:

- budgets from partners located in different areas/Member States/countries where legal requirements may not all be the same (or even the currency);
- levels of local expenses incurred by each partner as well as contributions to shared expenditures related to the whole partnership); and
- financial sources, which may each have specific requirements.



Clarifying financial issues at the beginning of a project and involving financial partners early enables the partners to anticipate difficulties and find ways to overcome them in advance.

The first questions to be answered are:

- What is the total budget of the project (including costs and contributions from different sources) and what is the budget for each partner?
- What part of the budget is for local activities and what part is devoted to common activities (joint actions)?
- How is the project budget split between the different actions?

This information should be in your application form. You might have to reorganise your own versions of this information to fit the application form requirements. Reaching common agreements about the project budget is an important step in the preparatory phases and will help ensure transparency throughout the project implementation phase.

Be aware!
Income generating activities!

Some cooperation projects may lead to activities generating income. In this case, you should estimate the income and its distribution between the different partners. Each partner will then have to deal with this income according to their own Member State specific rules.

2.2.4. Bringing together the required resources: knowledge and technical

Besides the internal human resources that you have foreseen in your application, additional support may be available from rural networks such as:

- Regional rural networks (where they exist). These may offer advice about the content of funding applications.
- National Networks. They may also provide funding advice as well as methodological guidance and partner search functions.
- The EU CAP Network can help with information about cooperation issues and provides an online partner search tool.

Be aware!

Do not hesitate to seek support! If you have less TNC experience, you can also involve an external specialist expert. Experts should have good knowledge of TNC methods and helpful language skills. They can give guidance during preparation stages and act as moderators during partner meetings. Contact your national/regional network support unit to find the right persons/institutions for support.


The tools which can help you:

- Tool 3 – Terms of reference and selection criteria for selecting external experts

2.3. Implementing TNC projects

What you have already done at this stage:

- ✓ You have confirmed your partnership
- ✓ You have formalised the content and development of the foreseen project in the application for funding, a memorandum of understanding, etc.
- ✓ You have found and brought together the required resources: human, technical, financial, etc.

Implementing a cooperation project involves numerous actions, many of which are technical and specific to individual project objectives, for instance, organising training or events, developing publications or websites, marketing new products, purchasing goods or services, etc. In many ways, these are similar to the activities of other projects that do not involve cooperation. In this practical guide, we will focus on those activities which are specific to cooperation projects, such as:



- Setting up and managing the partnership.
- Formalising the partnership.
- Activating and animating the different partners.
- Monitoring the implementation progress of a cooperation project.

Expected results:

- Understanding the different possible roles for partners and what they imply.
- Preparation of an activity plan and monitoring plan for the project.
- Cooperation partners sign the cooperation agreement.
- Organisation of communication activities between partners.
- Adoption of a legal structure for the partnership.
- Being prepared for activity reports and future controls.
- Carrying out the agreed project activities.
- Producing the intended benefits.

2.3.1. **Setting up and managing the cooperation partnership**

Organising the partnership for TNC can sometimes be complex due to cultural differences and/or the number of partners involved. It is, therefore, of crucial importance to have a highly competent project coordinator and clear rules for decision-making.

Identify the project coordinator



Good management of a cooperation project is essential for its success, and this should be ensured by the project coordinator(s). Ideally, one of the partners is clearly identified as the overall project leader (or lead partner). Within this lead partner structure, one person should be in overall charge of the implementation, animation, monitoring and management of the project.

Various approaches exist for TNC project coordination. These include:

- A single TNC coordinator operational throughout the full project lifespan. This person may be a representative/employee of one of the partners, chosen by the others, who accepts responsibility for the general management and coordination of the cooperation work programme.
- Shared/rotating coordination. Here, the partners take turns to manage and coordinate different phases or aspects of the cooperation work programme, according to predefined elements. In this case, good coordination must be ensured between the different coordinators. This may enable a certain acquisition of skills in terms of cooperation project management and coordination, notably for the less experienced partners.

The choice of coordination approach will depend on the capacity of the partners in terms of their resources for the coordination tasks (human and financial resources), the preferences of the partners, and the type of project.

Be aware!

Coordinating a project requires important competencies! A 'good' cooperation coordinator will preferably have:

- Language skills to communicate directly with the partners.
- Previous experience in cooperation project management or working with external partners.
- Good project management capacities.
- Good communication, diplomacy and negotiation skills.

Set up the decision-making process

Decision-making processes should be clearly defined and described in a document validated by all partners (in the application form and in the cooperation agreement) to ensure transparency and to avoid any misunderstanding. This document should also refer to relevant legally binding conditions set by the managing authority in relation to the CSP funding.

You may choose to set up a decision-making committee (executive committee) grouping representatives of the different partners which will be the decision-making structure for the whole project. Decisions can then be made either informally or by vote with pre-defined rules governing representation. This solution is compatible with both a unique coordinator and a system of shared or rotating coordination. Yet, since it implies the creation of an additional structure, it may be appropriate only for the more complex partnerships (i.e. the ones involving a higher number of partners).

2.3.2. Formalising the partnership

The cooperation agreement

The cooperation agreement is usually the main tool to specify the commitments and roles of each partner in a TNC project. A formal project cooperation agreement can be prepared and signed once the project details are clear and the partner roles, roadmap and timetable have been approved. This document is the ‘contract’ in which partners formally commit themselves to implement the planned actions within the defined deadlines. This cooperation agreement is a legally binding agreement that also helps give the partnership a more official status.

Be aware!

Sign a document at an early stage.

The idea is to formalise commitment and not to explain what has happened. A formal document can be signed as soon as the project, its content and its rules of implementation are clear.

The cooperation agreement might avoid future problems.

The cooperation agreement can contribute to solving remaining questions and/or ambiguities and clarifying missing elements.

Annex 4 of the DG AGRI Guidance for implementation of LEADER Cooperation activities in 2014-2020 Rural Development Programmes includes a generic template for a cooperation agreement, which provides a good outline of the main components/contents of such an agreement.

A cooperation agreement can take many forms:

- An exchange of detailed letters where the roles, obligations and commitments of each partner are expressed. This is a simple solution but is difficult to make legally binding in case of problems.

- A cooperation protocol which should cover the same aspects as above.
- A cooperation agreement under national law (normally of the country of the lead partner) or with a European status (e.g. European Economic Interest Group (EEIG)) where the different articles cover all the aspects of the project implementation and the distribution of the roles (including financial data, decision making process, etc.).

Set up a common structure for the cooperation project (optional)

Setting up a common structure for a cooperation project is not an obligation; however, in some specific contexts (long-term cooperation planned even after the lifetime of the specific LEADER cooperation project), the partners may choose to set up a formal structure for the implementation of the project. This means choosing an appropriate type of structure and preparing the related legal status. This option can be more relevant for cooperation projects with a longer, more complex implementation schedule and activities.

'Tool 6 – Possible legal forms to support the cooperation' provides more information on setting up common structures.

Before writing statutes, it is important to define the most suitable legal form considering the partners, objectives and actions to be implemented within the cooperation project, etc. It is also important to understand the pros and cons of different legal structures.

The choice of a specific type of structure is directly linked to the project stage. It might not be necessary to envisage a 'heavy' partnership being formalised with a new structure at the very beginning of the project. A lighter form (which may even be informal, provided a cooperation agreement is clear enough about the roles and obligations of each partner) will enable the project to grow slowly and be better defined. It is only when it is totally operational that a common structure should be adopted to formalise the partnership.

The following checklist comprises questions that partners should ask themselves before choosing a legal structure:

- Do we need to have a formalised common legal structure for the implementation of the cooperation project? What would the benefit of this legal structure be for the cooperation project and the actions to be implemented? Is a complete cooperation agreement not enough?
- Which different types of legal structure exist that are recognised in all of the partners' countries?

For each legal structure, different issues will have to be considered:

- Does the legal status match the cooperation project, status of the partners involved and actions to be carried out?
- What would the choice lead to in terms of further requirements (notably in terms of administrative, financial and/or control procedures)?
- What would the consequences of the different legal structures be for the day-to-day implementation of the project (during its implementation and when running, notably in terms of delays and human resources)?

2.3.3. Animating a cooperation partnership

Animation activities are essential to keep a project doing what it is intended to do. Animation must be carefully planned and cover all project tasks. Animation roles are often assigned to project coordinators, but external experts can also be contracted to animate projects. External animation contractors need skills in managing cooperation projects, in multicultural approaches and the moderation of relationships between partners.

Be aware!

External animation does not mean that partners do not need to get involved on the contrary. Working with an external facilitator takes some of the workload away from the partners. Yet, the partners must remain in charge of the project and its direction. The project should not be taken over by the facilitator. The partners therefore must stay involved to steer the implementation process and retain control of decision-making processes.

In terms of animating project content, it is useful to set up working groups with responsibilities for specific parts of the project's implementation. It may be useful (and more convenient) to give responsibility for each working group to individual partners.

These working groups should operate in close collaboration with the overall coordinator, who will be responsible for collating their inputs and disseminating information about the working groups' progress throughout the partnership.

Some tools and methods will help you with animation actions. Each of these is detailed below.

Write a roadmap for the cooperation project



A common work programme, often called a ‘road map’, should be defined and validated. This agreed content can help ensure a smooth implementation of the project actions and provide a tool to support the relationship between partners. The coordinators should use this road map as a key tool for monitoring project progress and tracking achievements. It can also be used to highlight actions that are falling behind and encourage partners to rectify such slippage.

The roadmap should identify:

- The different components and steps of the cooperation project.
- The actions to be carried out for each step.
- The responsible partners, targets and indicators for each step.

Be aware!

Cooperation takes time. You should keep in mind, when writing the timetable, that cooperation activities often take longer than local ones. Therefore, be realistic and do not hesitate to slightly overestimate the time required for the duration of some phases of the project to stay on the target as much as possible and avoid disappointment.

Writing the road map at an early stage helps to allow for some flexibility by planning only major steps and not every small step that makes up these major steps.

The road map should be updated, if required, to fit with any new realities that arise during the implementation phase. The consequence of each change should be well identified. Changes should be kept to a minimum to assist the road map’s monitoring functions.

Organise meetings, visits and exchanges

Modern electronic communication tools and methods (email, online platforms, social media, etc.) make it easier to initiate, establish or even maintain a cooperation partnership in a TNC project; yet, for the cooperation to be ‘real’ and lead to a good exchange and tangible results, it is important to plan face to face meetings.

Indeed, from experience, face-to-face contact is crucial to facilitate effective project implementation, maintain and strengthen the partnerships, and boost mutual learning opportunities.

Cooperation meetings can either be regular and short or less frequent but longer. All will depend on the issues to be discussed, the distance between the partners, the knowledge they have and the number of partners. Whatever the type of meeting foreseen (study visits, seminars, exchange programmes, video conference etc.), it is necessary for every planned meeting to:

- Prepare the meeting well to achieve maximum efficiency.
- For in-person meetings, be clear on what each partner will have to pay for during and after the meeting (including in terms of accommodation and meals).
- Plan what each partner should do before the meeting and what they should bring to the meeting.
- Define a clear agenda agreed on by all participants.
- Foresee that complete minutes will have to be written and distributed to all participants for their agreement.
- Foresee any language difficulty and plan professional interpretation if necessary.
- Conclude the meeting with a short summary of what has been said and, most importantly, on the commitments which have been taken by each participant (who does what and by what deadline).

Be aware!

Speaking a language does not mean having the skills of interpretation. Interpretation requires specific knowledge and does not leave any time to participate actively in the meeting. You should, therefore, not hesitate to appoint a professional interpreter even if people in your team appear to have good language skills. If they are to be involved in the content, they will not be able to spend time acting as interpreters.

This is not necessary if there is a common language spoken sufficiently well by all participants (including the more technical project aspects).

Organise communication between partners

In addition to meetings and the signing of documents, it is important to ensure that the partners are in regular contact, notably to understand progress in different areas and how this relates to their own work. Communication is also essential to facilitate project management, monitoring, reporting and administration.

A common communication plan should be agreed on during the project planning stages. This provides a framework for regular email exchanges, online and video exchanges, feedback on the actions carried out locally in the different areas, report submission deadlines, etc.

Language issues can limit these regular exchanges. This issue should be foreseen and overcome by using translation and interpretation services or, for long-term projects, by considering language training to boost technical expertise for relevant project personnel. All important documents should be translated whenever possible. This has become much easier and there are many free translation tools available online. It is important to have a knowledgeable native speaker check the translations for accuracy.

Be aware!

Different solutions exist to facilitate the language issue.

It is indeed always possible to work with professional translators or interpreters, but you can also choose to work with language students, foreign students in the area, local residents who may be from another country, etc.

Take into account the cultural aspects of the project of each partner

Beneficial progress can be made by embracing cultural diversity as a project strength and harnessing it as an engine of creativity to stimulate different ideas. Problems can be transformed into opportunities by promoting open dialogue on different perspectives to common constraints.

Ensure the continuous commitment of partners to the cooperation project

All partners should be interested in the project and remain committed to participating, as established in the cooperation agreement. Further to this 'obligatory' commitment, it is useful to make the project a dynamic partnership for all participants to feel ownership, involvement, contributions and benefits from the project. This can be achieved through programmed communication actions such as organising informal (online) events on a regular basis and developing common communication tools and documents.

Actions that help ease potential partnership burdens are also effective in encouraging greater participation. Agreeing to standardised operating procedures and producing associated guidance (such as manuals and reporting templates) helps reduce potential misunderstandings, conflicts and inefficiencies.

Be aware!

Cooperation is both transnational AND local.

At transnational level, implementation means following the different actions, managing the project and the financial issues, evaluating the results of the project, etc.

At local level, implementation means carrying out the local actions which will feed in the cooperation project and using the results of the cooperation projects for the LDS.

Continuous involvement of the local actors helps secure the link between the cooperation project and what is happening locally. This requires regular communication with local stakeholders about up-to-date project progress, including results of cooperation meetings and different project phases, etc.

The local cooperation think tank set up during the first steps of defining the cooperation strategy can act as a cooperation monitoring committee. If this approach is chosen, the committee should receive regular reports regarding ongoing progress with each project element.

Members of the think tank/committee could also be invited to take part in some of the project meetings and visits to provide an external viewpoint and feedback on the activities carried out. These additional human inputs can create valuable benefits for all involved.

Remember...

- Do not assume that all issues are clear for all partners before they have been discussed in depth. It may therefore be better to say things twice than not at all.
- The partnership can change during the implementation phase. Hence, allow for such changes (more or fewer partners, different participants) and define from the beginning the rules for such developments.
- When cooperation partnerships involve a great number of structures, it may be useful to plan several smaller meetings rather than one big one. Yet, from time to time, it is still necessary for all partners to come together.

2.3.4. Monitoring implementation progress



Monitoring progress is an essential part of the implementation of any project, including a TNC project. However, monitoring a TNC project can be slightly more complicated as it involves sharing the roles between different partners and agreeing on who is responsible for what.

Monitoring is a management tool. It refers to a process of measuring progress against the project monitoring indicators that were agreed upon at the project's start. Monitoring indicators can measure both quantitative and qualitative information, and it is essential that all partners use consistent monitoring methodologies (including common indicator definitions). You should keep in mind that:

- In relation to project objectives linked to joint actions, ideally, the measurement systems used by each partner should be the same. For example, if you are aiming to create jobs you must all use the same definition for a job created (i.e. the same number of hours per week for a set number of months).
- Partners may also use some specific indicators to measure progress related to their local actions within the project.
- In some cases, it may be necessary to establish a baseline against which to measure progress. This is often the case for qualitative targets such as improved quality of life or community confidence. For such concepts, a common definition agreed upon by all partners for project purposes should also be developed.
- Standardised monitoring methodologies and reporting templates will enhance the effectiveness of TNC project monitoring frameworks and help facilitate the efficient collation of results from all partners.

Monitoring is normally carried out internally by project partners and should occur regularly. The division of monitoring tasks (which partner monitors which activity/target), as well as the frequency for measuring progress, should also be agreed in advance by all partners.

Monitoring can confirm that a project is proceeding to plan or provide an early warning that performance is not as expected. It can help to check if the achievement of project objectives proceeds as planned. For this, it is useful to establish milestones (partial targets which are to be achieved at a specific point in time).

Be aware!

It is important that the monitoring indicators selected are SMART, meaning:

- **Specific:** what exactly will be measured, in which geographical area and by what unit(s)?
- **Measurable:** for the project to be in a position to collect information and data, what are the initial (so-called baseline) figures?
- **Achievable:** what changes are anticipated as a result of the project? Are they realistic?
- **Relevant:** will the indicators measure the project's key activities?
- **Timed:** when something should happen? In which period?

2.4. Evaluation and communication

2.4.1. Evaluation



Monitoring, discussed in the previous section, and evaluation occur at different stages in a TNC project. They are interlinked since monitoring provides a lot of data for evaluation. Evaluation is a tool which can be used to assess the project's process, progress and achievements and draw lessons for the future. Past experience has demonstrated the crucial role of monitoring and evaluation in:

- steering and managing cooperation projects;
- Communicating the full set of results from cooperation, including its added value for the local area; and
- improving the quality of future projects by identifying good practices and sharing knowledge gained.

Evaluation findings can be used as a communication tool. The results of a TNC project evaluation can be used to demonstrate to the local population, the financial partners and the press the actual benefits of a European project. One way of presenting the results of the project may be to organise an event, together with your transnational partner(s) visiting your area.

It is extremely important to establish and implement the monitoring and evaluation process and define your indicators from the moment you start writing the project roadmap/application form.

For further guidance on evaluation-related topics, a good starting point is the [European Evaluation Helpdesk of the CAP's section](#) on the EU CAP Network website.

2.4.2. Communication and dissemination of results of TNC projects



You should ensure that the benefits of your project do not stay only with those who were involved in its implementation. They should be disseminated as widely as possible across your areas and to other LAG areas that may be inspired by your example. You must also make sure that information about your project reaches broader audiences. For this, you need a wide range of dissemination and communication tools.

European cooperation can facilitate exchanges between countries and, hence, different ways of thinking. It has the potential to push the emergence of new ideas and solutions for rural areas further. Disseminating good practices ensures that everybody can benefit from the experiences of others. Dissemination is clearly linked to evaluation and contributes to the promotion of transnational cooperation.

Dissemination tools may be chosen depending on the target group: (potential) beneficiaries, elected representatives, press/media, general or specific public (inhabitants, business community...), etc. The way that information is presented/structured is likely to differ.

The capitalisation and dissemination of TNC project results can be undertaken using different types of tools:

- Videos about the project with interviews from stakeholders.
- Events promoting TNC projects.
- Social media and other online tools.
- Printed and online publications.
- Project factsheets, usually comprising the following elements:
 - Identity – Describing the profile and characteristics of the area of the lead and other partners.
 - Presentation of the project objective(s).
 - Project implementation methodology.
 - Expected and achieved results.
 - Lessons learned.
 - Transferability – How are the conditions linked to the local context? What would it take to adapt the project to another context?

Remember that NNs and, at the EU level, the EU CAP Network can also help with the capitalisation of TNC project results and disseminate them to the relevant audiences. Indeed, many NNs and the EU CAP Network are on the lookout for interesting examples of successful cooperation projects. Don't forget to tell them about your project.

All actions co-financed by EU funds have to be publicised. Communication is crucial in this public awareness raising process for:

- stimulating interest in TNC opportunities among local actors and potential future TNC project developers/participants;
- contributing to broadening the dominant way of thinking in a territory by introducing new ideas gained during transnational relationships;
- sharing experiences, thus disseminating good practices to other rural areas in Europe; and
- raising awareness about the potential that Europe offers, thus establishing a concrete vision of European action.

Guidance on the use of the [visual identification of LEADER](#) is available in the LEADER tools section of the EU CAP Network website.

Different communication tools, messages and timings can relate to different target audiences:

Target group	Objective	Which tools	When
Beneficiaries	To raise awareness about EU co-financing obtained.	Visibility methods employed include standard references displayed on project documentation, PR materials (incl. those addressing schools) and putting EU flags up during project presentations and project events.	Throughout project implementation and particularly when actions involve beneficiaries.
Potential beneficiaries	To display the potential diversity of topics that can be addressed and benefits achieved by TNC projects.	PR materials including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Factsheet • Project video • Press articles • Information meetings involving cooperation operators (testimonies) 	Throughout project implementation.
Elected representatives	To raise interest in TNC: what is the added value for their territory?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information meetings with testimonies of selected people involved in TNC projects • Project video 	At the beginning and end of the project.
Press/media	To promote TNC to the general public by means of a concrete project example. To highlight the European dimension.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project factsheet • Project video • Press articles 	When the project has achieved its first tangible results. During an important stage of TNC project implementation (event).
General public	To raise visibility of the European involvement in the development of rural areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard reference displayed on project documentation, PR materials (incl. those addressing schools) and putting EU flags up during project presentations and events • Project flyer, project videos and articles in the press 	During project implementation and when presenting the project to the general public.

In addition to the above, you may need to plan for communication with/to your relevant national or regional CSP authorities and networks. The content and method of such communication may be defined by the relevant CSP, national or regional guidelines, or in cooperation with the national/regional CAP network.

Remember...

- Foresee a communication plan in your application form, including a description of target groups, aims and tools/actions/timing.
- Keep your TNC project factsheet short, though understandable and precise.
- Adapt messages for dissemination to the target group.

3. Annex – ‘Tools’ for Transnational Cooperation

3.1. Tool 1 – Questions to consider before starting a TNC project

3.1.1. Context

- What is our vision for the socioeconomic context and the political and institutional framework of our LAG territory? What contribution can cooperation make to realising this vision?
- What rural development challenges and socioeconomic and/or environmental needs exist (including their causes and effects)?
- Which of those challenges can be addressed using TNC? In what way?

3.1.2. Cooperation diagnosis: transnational experiences of our area

- What existing experiences of cooperation are there and what have they led to?
- What are the main topics of transnational projects to date?
- Which local actors already have EU or third country contacts?
- Which local actors have already been involved in activities with external partners?
- Which local actors have the language skills we need?
- Who are the foreign partners of our local authorities?
- Which local actors have already been involved in TNC projects?
- Has our LAG cooperated with LAGs from other countries?
 - With which LAGs from which countries?
 - Was the experience positive?
 - What did we learn?

3.1.3. Project options

- What do we need locally, what are the local expectations and what type of added value/benefits should cooperation lead to?
- Which local actors already have ideas concerning possible cooperation projects?
- What is their motivation and capacity?
- What are their cooperation ideas for our area?
- What type of project could be developed (e.g. exchange of experiences, research, design and implementation of a joint solution to a common challenge)?

3.2. Tool 2 – Organising cooperation ideas into priorities

3.2.1. Introduction

The prioritisation of ideas for TNC projects can help in maintaining the strategic role of transnational cooperation within the LAG strategy. After collecting project ideas, the next stage involves carrying out an analysis of each idea so that they can be properly assessed and compared. The projects with the highest priority will normally be the projects that create the most benefits for your LAG's territory.

Analysis can involve completing and comparing a common set of questions for each project idea (see example in Annex 1). These questions are generic, you may also include additional questions specific to the objectives of your LDS and/or your LAG's defined cooperation strategy.

Answers to these questions can then inform the consideration of project options (individual or multiple) against some basic prioritisation and selection criteria. The example in Annex 2 (below) uses four criteria;

- relevance;
- efficiency;
- effectiveness; and
- participative approach.

Projects can be scored against these criteria e.g. on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 point = low and 5 = high. The sum of the scores can then be used for the ranking of the project ideas. You may wish to introduce mandatory minimum or threshold scores for some criteria. It may be useful to provide examples of project factors or features that score high, medium or low. You may adapt this framework to fit the objectives of your cooperation strategy.

Further important and useful points to consider when prioritising TNC project options are noted below. It is important to clarify these matters before going ahead and looking for partners:

- Set priorities and concentrate efforts on a limited number of truly strategic actions because human resources, time and financial means are inevitably limited.
- Have a clear idea of the resources (physical, financial and human) that may be allocated for cooperation. This will help the LAG make decisions about what types of projects they can afford.
- Ensure that you have enough resources to achieve both the TNC project goals and carry out your other work. Experience from some LAGs shows that the investment of effort, time and resources into TNC actions impacted their capacity to properly carry out their everyday work of implementing their LDS.

TNC often requires inputs from different local actors. Establishing and maintaining this momentum among local partners is a critical success factor and the work involved in this should be considered as part of the analysis for each project idea. Each project idea therefore needs to have a plan for mobilising relevant actors and keeping all stakeholders informed about project progress and the inputs required from them at different times.

3.2.2. Annex 1 – Table to analyse project ideas

Question	Answer
To what extent will the results created by this TNC project contribute to addressing your territory's main development challenges and opportunities set out in your Local Development Strategy?	
What targets (quantitative and qualitative) does the project have?	
To what extent are these realistic and how practical are they to measure?	
Who are the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the project, and to what extent are the expected results relevant to them?	
Who are the local partners involved and what can they contribute to the project?	
How realistic and comprehensive is the plan for mobilising local participation?	
What advantages will be gained from working with a partner to address the territory's main development challenges and opportunities?	
Could we achieve similar benefits for our area from working on our own without a cooperation partner or working with an inter-regional rather than transnational partner?	
What factors are essential to ensure the project's success?	
To what extent are any risks which may limit the success of the project identified and mitigated?	
How much funding will this project need, and what other resources (skills, equipment, time) are necessary?	
Is this project idea eligible for support under LEADER? To what extent could/can it be funded by other sources?	
How likely is it that we can obtain all the funding and other resources we need for the project?	

3.2.3. Annex 2 – Key criteria to analyse cooperation project options

Relevance	Score
To what extent does the project address a real problem or need identified in the LDS?	
How well will the project complement other rural development work in the LAG territory?	
How appropriate is the timing to launch such a project?	
Efficiency	
Are the expected objectives and results achievable?	
Are the proposed resources available and sufficient to reach the objectives?	
If launched now, what is the likelihood that the project can be completed on target and on time?	
Efficacy (cost-benefit ratio)	
How reasonable is the balance between the financial resources proposed and the anticipated results?	
To what extent is the balance comparable with other LAG projects supported?	
To what extent is the added value gained for the LAG area as a result of the project sufficient to justify the additional effort and resources?	
Participative approach	
To what degree can the project rely on an active and balanced participation and commitment of the different local partners?	

3.3. Tool 3 – Terms of reference and selection criteria for selecting external experts

3.3.1. Defining the tasks and selecting external experts

If you have decided to use an external expert to help you with your cooperation project, then it is important to define their tasks and specify the required skills and experience before you select them.

3.3.2. Specification of the expert and tasks

An external expert does not necessarily have to be a professional consultant. Rural areas often have local actors who can provide a well-informed and objective view. Such a person would typically already have a good knowledge of the local area, its local actors, challenges and opportunities. Their local knowledge may make the facilitation tasks easier and smoother.

Choosing an external expert involves specifying the terms of reference (ToR), drawn up in accordance with the project specifications. This ToR may include the following:

- The general context of the expert's task, for example:
 - the purpose of a specific task/mission;
 - the context of a project, its areas and its various partners;
 - the project's description and its current stage of development.
- The recommended approach, for example:

- any preferred or essential working methods specified by project partners (e.g. participatory methods);
- the involvement of partner organisations and any organisational approach to be employed.
- The objectives of the expert's tasks, for example:
 - the expected outcomes of the task allocated to the expert;
 - how the expert can contribute to the overall project design and implementation;
 - the most important factors that should be given priority.
- Proposal, timetable and report, for example:
 - the duration and budget (optional) of the task;
 - starting and finishing dates and any intermediate milestones; and
 - expected outputs/reports/methods of reporting and desired formats.
- Required expert qualifications and experience for undertaking the work.

3.3.3. Selecting external experts

It may be helpful to identify potential experts by consulting other LEADER groups (including project partners) who have good operators capable of carrying out the mission or know consultants and experts specialised in these subjects. The following tables can be used to support the selection of external experts and their proposals. These are generic suggestions and can be amended to suit your specifications.

The Consultant						
Criteria	Evaluation, ranking from 1 (weak) to 5 (good)					Comments
	1	2	3	4	5	
Professional references						
Professional quality/experience of Consultant(s):						
Ability to communicate effectively						
Appropriate level of professional knowledge and skills						
Specific and relevant knowledge of the cooperation theme						
Knowledge of languages of the partners						
Knowledge and experience of local development						
Experience in transnational cooperation						

<i>The Proposal</i>						
Criteria	Evaluation, ranking from 1 (weak) to 5 (good)					Comments
	1	2	3	4	5	
Evidence of understanding of requirements and tasks						
Realism, clarity and appropriateness of methodology proposed						
Assistance proposed in preparatory phase						
Assistance proposed in implementation phase						
Monitoring support						
Resources allocated to project support						
Specific knowledge of the cooperation theme						
Risk assessment, problem-solving and management						
Communication with project management						
Reporting						
Price/Value for money						

3.4. Tool 4 – Checklist for meetings with partners

3.4.1. Before the first meeting

- Consult the relevant EU CAP Network information (available under the [LEADER Transnational Cooperation](#) section of the EU CAP Network website).
- Inform the identified partners about your administrative, technical and financial framework.
- Agree on who will participate. Try to make sure that all partners broadly bring the same delegation of people e.g. LAG managers, LAG members, project promoter(s), financial partners, etc.
- Agree on the meeting format (online or face-to-face) and location (if a face-to-face meeting is planned).
- Agree on the meeting agenda/programme:
 - together with the partners – plan sufficient time for social interaction as well as work;
 - by defining a detailed programme adapted to the different types of participants (do not forget specific meetings with LAG members and others like experts and/or technical people); and
 - by integrating the objectives and expected results of each session into the programme so everyone knows what to expect.
- Reflect on the history of the project (e.g., selection of its theme), the partnership, and the context of each territory (characteristics, strategy,

human resources, etc.). Prepare a summary and/or presentation.

- Identify the working language and, if needed, mobilise interpreters (high priority).
- Make it clear who is going to cover the costs for the first meeting, how and when.
- Plan moderators and ‘rapporteurs’ for the first meeting and each session e.g. official times presided by LAG members, technical working time led by animators/experts, etc.
- Choose and prepare any field visits with the partners.
- Select the preferred means of communication with the partners.

3.4.2. During the first meeting

- Allow enough time to present the project areas and people (stakeholders, etc.).
- Present the project clearly and concisely as a common basis for discussions.
- Discuss and agree on the following points with partners:
 - Each partner’s expectations are participation, costs, outputs, etc.
 - Administrative rules for cooperation.
 - Internal procedures and practicalities (e.g. time to respond to emails, etc.).
 - Further definition of the project.
 - Timelines and key milestones.
 - The possibility or need to set up a legal structure to lead and support the project.
 - The roles and responsibilities of each partner (including the role of the lead partner).
 - Conflict resolution mechanisms.
 - Budget/Schedule.
- Keep track of the exchanges and collate reports, notes, meeting documents, business cards, videos and photographs to summarise decisions made.
- Ensure time at the end of the meeting to plan the next steps and future meetings.

3.4.3. Following the first meeting

- Write the minutes of the meeting/meeting report and send it to partners for validation.
- Consult the local cooperation team to confirm the final partnership.
- Check the rules and procedures for cooperation projects applicable to each partner.
- Communicate the results of the first meeting to every member of the LAG Board (use interactive and dynamic support such as photographs, movies, etc.).
- Define an action plan compatible with the general plan of the LAG.

- Organise regular contacts with your partners.

3.5. Tool 5 – Presenting your territory

The following headings can act as a helpful template for presenting your territory to your partners during the first visit. It is intended to be used as a written document to forward to your partners presenting basic information rather than as a support for an oral presentation.

3.5.1. The country

- Administrative organisation and structures.
- Specificities of implementing LEADER in my country.
- LEADER cooperation conditions and implementing procedures.

Keep this part short. It is just meant to give general background information and raise important issues concerning the future project (i.e. a common action, orientation on one specific theme of the CSP, etc.) and what the general administrative structures for the project are.

3.5.2. The territory

From your Local Development Strategy

- Location, map and photographs.
- Key geographic, economic and social characteristics.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

Summary of key points of the Local Development Strategy

- The LAG partnership.
- Key needs and objectives prioritised.
- Financial and other resources available.
- The role of cooperation and any priorities identified in the local strategy.

3.5.3. Linking the local strategy, the cooperation theme and specific project

- Local situation regarding the cooperation theme (including, when relevant, elements of the social, economic or environmental activity linked to the theme).

- Local issues, problems to be solved and questions raised.
- Local expertise (what we can contribute to the partnership and project).
- Theme-specific local needs.

3.5.4. Existing cooperation projects in the territory

The following table can summarise the status of any existing cooperation projects in the territory, whether LEADER or under another programme or initiative.

Cooperation project title	Cooperation framework (twinning, decentralised cooperation, Interreg...)	Project theme and outline	Project holder	Cooperation partners	Status*

* 'Status' refers to the stage at which the cooperation project is being developed. Some possible options include a first idea, a first visit that has already been organised, an ongoing project, a finished project, etc.

3.6. Tool 6 – Possible legal structures for cooperation projects



Setting up a common legal structure is not mandatory for a cooperation project. In most cases, a cooperation agreement should provide an adequate legal framework for cooperation projects. A generic template for a cooperation agreement is presented as an annex of the updated DG AGRI guidance for implementation of LEADER cooperation activities in 2014-2020 Rural Development Programmes.

In case cooperation partners decide to set up a specific legal structure for the project, they should remember that setting this up can involve a lot of effort and – usually – costs. This should only be done if there is a strong justification for it. A list of types of legal structures is presented below but is not exhaustive and includes references to EU level guidance only. If the cooperation partners decide to set up a legal structure, the relevant Member State regulations should also be considered.

3.6.1. Types of legal structures

European company

If your project is strongly focused on business-type activities and needs an independent actor to carry them out, you may consider setting up a European

company, such as a public, limited liability company regulated by EU law. You will find more information [here](#).

Non-profit association

The partners may decide to set up a non-profit association according to the laws of one of the countries of participating LAGs. The relevant regulations of the selected countries need to ensure that transnational partners can become members of such an association. It is also possible to set up an international NGO based in Brussels at the EU level. You will find more information on the [website](#) of the Federation of European and International Associations established in Belgium.

European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

This type of legal entity is designed to promote cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation. Its membership may only comprise public bodies. You will find more information [here](#).

3.6.2. Legal statutes

Writing statutes for the legal structure of a cooperation project needs to be done through close coordination between the partners. Several exchanges will be required to:

- Define statutes that match the legal requirements and constraints in the EU (if you are setting up a European structure) and in the Member States of the different partners.
- Find the right balance between the partners' needs, the actions that the new legal entity is expected to implement, and the minimum requirements for any international organisation i.e. balanced representation of the different partners and areas involved, presidency of the structure representing the different partners (a 'revolving' presidency changing every year can be a satisfactory solution), choice of a working language.
- Enable the common structure to be active within a reasonable timeframe and allow the structure to be modified over time. Consider if the structure has a limited life period and if (and under which conditions) members of the structure step out of it or new members are included, etc.

It is not possible to cover all the possibilities of such an entity's legal statutes here. The following checklist presents some of the most important aspects of statutes. These can be considered a 'minimum set' of requirements, which then may have to be adapted to the individual partnership, the project implemented and the type of structure eventually chosen. They are:

- The key partners involved and their legal status.

- The objectives.
- Its name and where it is located.
- Its organisation and governance (decision-making structure, technical team, etc.), the different competencies, etc.
- How members will be invited to meetings.
- The rules for representation and decision-making.
- The criteria for the participation of members to the financial needs and budget rules.
- The life span of the structure and steps to terminate it, if required.

3.7. Tool 7 – Roadmap for cooperation projects (template)

The ‘roadmap’ for a TNC project should be developed together with the cooperation partners and guide the schedule of activities within the project. Each partner can adapt the common roadmap and include the local activities they link to the cooperation project. A final, detailed schedule of activities can also be included in the cooperation agreement.

3.7.1. Roadmap template for cooperation project management (example)

No.	Activity	Start date (month/year)	End date (month/year)	Duration	Target group/location	Responsible/participating project partner(s)	Key output
1							
2							
3							
4							
...							

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