European Rural Networks' Assembly
LEADER/CLLD Subgroup meeting
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Department of Rural & Community Development (DRCD)

The **Rural Development and Regional Affairs Division** promotes and facilitates sustainable economic and social development across rural Ireland – LEADER Programme managed through this Division.

The **Community Development Division** enables and supports the development of vibrant, sustainable and inclusive communities in both urban and rural areas.

Department wide response to COVID-19 Crisis

Immediate actions

Community Response Group – encourage and facilitate community engagement responding to the needs of vulnerable people

COVID-19 Action Plan to support the community response – some of the initiatives

- How and where to go to volunteer

- Increasing community supports for older people

- Launched email helpdesk linking smaller community groups with information & support

- Published Community information packs with 7 thematic leaflets which were delivered to every home in the country

Community Call – State & voluntary sector, coordinated community activity, directing assistance to those in most need

Department wide response to COVID-19 Crisis

- **Stability Fund**

  - This Fund is designed to help defray non-staff costs such as rent, rates, insurance etc. and not for staff costs given that there are a number of other Government supports available in this area,

  - The levels of grant awards in the range €2k - €200k

  - Over 500 organisations supported with total funding approved of €25m.

- **Innovate Together Fund**

  - The focus of this Fund is on responses to the COVID-19 crisis that deliver innovative and adaptive solutions to existing and emerging social challenges.

  - The Fund is available to charities, social enterprises and community or voluntary organisations based in Ireland.

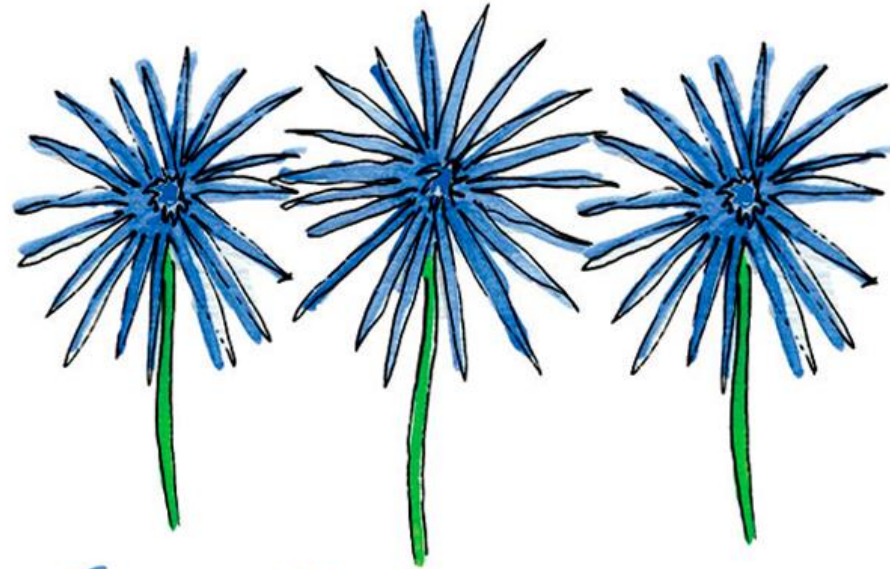 - €5m available from DRCD with matching contributions from philanthropic donations

LEADER Specific responses

- LAGs and Implementing Partners continued to work with promoters throughout the crisis period, work from home arrangements implemented

- No programmatic changes introduced as significant response provided directly by Department as referenced above

- Department as the MA introduced a number of administrative flexibilities to assist with the ability of the LAGs to maintain programme continuity

  - Flexibility around holding meetings via teleconferencing and written procedures,

  - Facilitated working from home by accepting electronic signatures on documents, email signatures, alternatives to scanning documents

  - Desk based OTSC, no on site visits

How rural communities/LEADER stakeholders have been affected

▶ Fund raising activities very much reduced

▶ Issues for Community Groups to hold meetings to progress project

▶ Construction work stopped for period of time

▶ Many commercial premises closed

▶ Slow down on Procurement, engineer reports etc.

▶ Problems with having match funding due to change in circumstances

▶ Shown that communities working together can overcome difficulties

▶ LEADER Programme continuing to demonstrate the resilience of rural communities and businesses, the Local Action Groups and Local Development Companies

    ▶ Project approvals and payments continued throughout

        ▶ 598 projects approved with a value of over €26m

        ▶ 588 promoters were paid over €17m – period March - Aug

Thank you

Go raibh maith agat

Learnings for the Future

- Community engagement is crucial

- Necessary to have good links established between Government and community groups

- Build on the connections made, create the environment for these to grow and develop

- New communities identified – essential to maintain their involvement

- Utilise the experience to foster greater cooperation between Government bodies and communities

- Potential for Smart Villages Initiatives to provide a mechanism for addressing new challenges identified during the crisis period

- All of this will bear fruit when the next LEADER LDS are being designed and written

- Experiences and lessons learned from this time should influence a more flexible administrative approach to future programme while also respecting the need for good oversight/governance