



Circular No: 02/2019
From: LEADER Unit
To: All LAGs, Implementing Partners and Financial Partners
Date Issued: 28th January 2019
Subject: Information Note on LEADER Funding for Broadband Infrastructure and
Broadband Connection Points

1. Background

At the LEADER capacity building seminar on the Broadband sub-theme in December 2018, the Department agreed to provide clarification on (1) the types of broadband infrastructure that could be supported under this sub-theme of the LEADER programme while being mindful of the requirement to adhere to the National Broadband Plan and (2) to provide information on the Broadband Connection Points (BCPs).

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is the State's policy response to the lack of high speed broadband throughout the country. No other telecoms infrastructure can be publicly funded in areas known as the intervention (amber) areas. In addition no telecoms infrastructure can be funded in areas where broadband is available but where speeds do not reach the minimum levels available under the NBP (blue areas). Such premises are currently being identified and high speed broadband will be provided to these under the NBP.

2. LEADER Funding for Broadband Infrastructure

LEADER funding is delivered through Local Action Groups in each of the 28 LEADER sub-regional areas around the country.

In order for a project to be eligible for LEADER funding, it must be compatible with the actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy in the sub-regional area concerned, and it must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme.

LEADER Local Action Groups have indicated in their Local Development Strategies that a total of approximately €3.5 million will be made available to fund projects under the LEADER sub-theme of Broadband over the duration of the 2014-2020 Programme – this includes, but is not limited to, spending on broadband infrastructure up to a maximum of €10,000 .

Ineligible Infrastructure

The DRCD and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment have agreed two definitions relevant to broadband infrastructure in order to provide clarity for Local Action Groups (LAGs) as to what infrastructure can and cannot be funded under the Broadband sub-theme:.



The following infrastructure cannot be funded by LEADER as it is covered by the NBP:

Broadband - Physical Infrastructure can be categorised as any element of a network without becoming itself an active element of the network, such as cables, pipes, masts, ducts, inspection chambers, manholes, cabinets, buildings or entries to buildings, antenna installations, towers and poles.

Broadband - Electronic Communications Network Infrastructure can be categorized as transmission systems such as switching, routing systems, external boosters used to strengthen/enhance Wi-Fi connections, which permit the conveyance of signals by wire, by radio, by optical or by other electromagnetic means.

Eligible Broadband Infrastructure

LEADER funding can, however, be provided for the following infrastructure items subject to the €10,000 limit:

- Small scale equipment (such as in-building boosters which ensure a reliable connection for end users) to allow local businesses/citizens access to broadband at the premises can be funded.
- Mobile phone repeaters in certain instances, e.g. mobile phone repeaters used to improve mobile phone coverage in a community facility can be funded.
- Cabling infrastructure (indoor broadband cabling).

Broadband infrastructure as outlined above may be funded under the LEADER Broadband sub-theme up to a maximum of 75% of the eligible costs for community based projects where there is no commercial basis for the project or 50% in the case of private promoters, subject to a maximum funding limit of €10,000 per successful proposal.

Other LEADER Funding under the Broadband theme

Funding under the broadband sub-theme is, of course, not limited to physical infrastructure. Examples of the other funding opportunities under this LEADER sub-theme include:

IT Equipment

The provision of IT equipment may be funded under the Broadband sub-theme. The type of IT equipment which can be funded includes desks, PCs, laptops, monitors, large screens, easy use tablets for the elderly.

The provision of IT equipment may also be funded under many of the other LEADER sub-themes where support of this nature is in line with the objectives of the approved LDS.

Funding for IT equipment is subject to the maximum rates of 75% for community based projects where there is no commercial basis for the project and 50% for private promoters subject to maximum funding limit of €200,000 per successful proposal.



Feasibility studies

Feasibility studies can be funded to allow communities to explore the options available to them. No follow on funding can be allocated to broadband infrastructure which has been deemed ineligible (see above), following the completion of these studies. However, funding may be provided for a wide range of activities which could also be identified as a result of the study such as the need for training, IT equipment, hot desk facilities, youth café etc.

Funding for feasibility studies is provided up to a maximum rate of 75% for private promoters and 90% for community based projects where there is no commercial basis for the project subject to a maximum funding limit of €30,000 per successful proposal.

Training

LEADER can also provide funding for training initiatives across a range of digital areas.

This training could take place in the Broadband Connection Points (BCPs), a number of which will be ideally placed to act as digital training centers. A key pillar of Local Authority local digital strategies will be to develop and enhance the digital skillset of citizens. BCPs will provide an ideal location to facilitate this. Leveraging LEADER funding would enable BCPs to act as dedicated locations for digital upskilling and will provide a space for digital learning and development.

Training initiatives can be funded up to 100% of eligible costs up to a maximum of €200,000 per successful training initiative.

3. Background to the Broadband Connection Points (BCPs)/Hubs

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), in consultation with local authority Broadband Officers and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment (DCCA), have identified a network of 296 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs). The aim of these BCPs is to provide free Wi-Fi to rural communities in advance of high-speed broadband being rolled out in their area under the National Broadband Plan. The hubs will provide early access to high-speed broadband for rural communities that are situated in areas that are likely to only be connected towards the end of the rollout process.

These hubs will be prioritised during rollout of the National Broadband Plan and will be connected within the first 12 months of rollout. The cost of connecting these locations will be shared between both Departments. A number of the connection hubs are located in some of the most rural communities throughout each local authority area, including islands off Donegal, Mayo & Galway. The network of 296 hubs include community centres, national schools, visitor centres, GAA clubs, industrial estates and business centres.

The establishment of the BCP network will contribute towards advancing the economic and social development of hundreds of local communities in areas surrounding the hubs. There is potential for BCPs to provide a wide range of services for people living in the locality. In addition,



BCPs can play a significant role in providing locations in which digital training initiatives and, potentially, digital innovation can be facilitated. The use of BCPs should feature in LA local digital strategies as these locations may well act as focal points for digital learning and innovation.

BCP Classification

There will be a number of different types of hubs depending on the nature of available resources in each locality. Hubs may consist of;

1. A Business Centre, situated in a public building which provides access to local businesses that may otherwise have to commute to access required broadband services.
2. A hot-desk facility which is open business hours or on demand (within business hours).
3. A facility with access for members of the public, such as a library or a Local Authority property.
4. A facility with limited public access (i.e. might be open a couple of hours a day, and/or a few days a week).
5. A local Wi-Fi hub with 'always on' Wi-Fi (potentially linked to 1-4 above but available out of hours). For example, the Wi-Fi would be available 24/7 in the building, persons could pull up within the grounds of the premises e.g. park just outside the building to access the Wi-Fi.

4. Next Steps

As outlined by the Department at the thematic workshop, the DRCD has clarified its preferred approach to the development of the BCPs. Following on from this, LAGs and Broadband Officers are encouraged to engage with each other and with community groups and local businesses to investigate what funding can be leveraged for BCPs. A list of each local authority Broadband Officer can be found at Annex 1.

ENDS

LEADER Unit



Annex 1: Broadband Officer Contact Details

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