

FOCUS GROUP 3: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEASURE "COOPERATION" IN LEADER

The aim of Focus Group 3 is to gather information and look for possible solutions to the following questions:

1. Different timing in decision-making and different administrative rules;
2. Different expectations towards beneficiaries in different programmes (definition of common action; partner contribution to the project budget);
3. Information needs (identifying emerging projects, information about procedures and eligibility rules applied in all programmes, running projects);
4. What are the key areas in which cooperation projects are most needed - what issues and how would that fit or contribute to the regional/national EU strategy?

A = proposal that could be implemented during current programming period
B = proposal that could be implemented in the next programming period
C = other proposals

POINTS TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING ON 16.02.2010 IN ESTONIA

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1. Different timing in decision-making and different administrative rules

1.1. Different timing in decision-making

Problem:

Two types of decision-making procedures are used: ongoing application or periodical calls, followed with time-bound provisional approval or definite approval. This leads to delays in start of projects due to the fact that several approvals are needed for each project. Each member state follows its national rules and regulations and it is not possible to change that.

Proposals for solution: (tbd)

- A. Better cooperation between national authorities who make the official decisions as well as between LAGs and national authorities, e.g. contact list of responsible national authorities could be made available in Internet. Active approach of all parties in order to make the delays as short as possible.
- B. In the future, only periodical calls could be used for TNC projects. In that case it would be possible to synchronize the timing of calls and decision-making in all Member States (MS).
- C. Other proposals?

1.2. Absence of preparatory technical support

Problem:

Not all Member States do follow the Commission's recommendation to include preparatory technical support for transnational cooperation projects into their programmes. However, preparatory technical support is especially important when a TNC project is started with a new partnership that has not worked together earlier on. Building of trust between the partners as well as

jointly agreeing on objectives of the project and division of tasks is essential for the success of any TNC project. Nevertheless, each Member State is entitled to follow its national rules and practises.

Proposals for solution: (tbd)

- A. Those Member States that do not allow preparatory technical support could amend and include it into their programmes still during this programming period.
- B. Preparatory phase could be included as a part of the TNC projects in the future. At the same time, the maximum duration of the TNC projects could be longer than the duration of national projects, i.e. five years. This would be justified as a common problem of TNC projects has been too short implementation period. A more complex structure of the TNC projects as well as partners from different countries and cultures requires more time for successful implementation.
- C. Other proposals?

1.3. Differences in the maximum level of funding

Problem:

Maximum level of funding in TNC projects might vary considerably in different Member States. In addition, most probably the LAGs from Member States that have low level of total LEADER funding cannot contribute high amounts in one TNC project.

Proposals for solution: (tbd)

- A. Concentration in small-scale TNC projects in order to avoid big differences in the contributions of different partners. Small-scale projects also fit well with the basic LEADER idea that is local level, bottom-up and people to people.
- B. More flexibility in TNC funding, e.g. no maximum amounts to be used in the future.
- C. Other proposals?

1.4. Differences in documentation requirements

Problem:

Some Member States ask for signed cooperation agreements to be annexed in the application while others only ask for letter of intent from the project partners.

Proposals for solution: (tbd)

- A. In practice, it is probably not possible to get signed agreements from all partners and countries at the time when no final decision for funding has been made. Therefore, letters of intent/commitment should be sufficient. Amendment of programmes in this respect?
- B. EU regulations/ COM rules to be amended in the future regarding the documentation requirements.

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2. Different expectations towards beneficiaries in different programmes (definition of common action; partner contribution to the project budget)

2.1 Definition of "common action"

Background:

MS use different criteria regarding the definition of "common action". The Guide on cooperation measure gives the following common interpretation:

"The cooperation project corresponds to a concrete action with clearly identified deliverables producing benefits for the territories; Expenditure relating to the Leader area does not mean necessarily expenditure located in the area. The action is "joint" in the sense that it is being jointly implemented.

The content of the joint action may cover a whole range of activities eligible under the axis/es implemented through the Leader method.

Joint actions that can be funded might also be focused on capacity building, transfer of experience on local development through e.g. common publications, training seminars, twinning arrangements (exchange of programme managers and staff) leading to the adoption of common methodological and working methods or to the elaboration of a joint or coordinated development work."

Problem:

Different definition or interpretation of common action of TNC in MS and even at regional programming level. Different eligible costs.

Proposals for solution: (tbd)

- A. Detailed information by MS about eligible actions in MS legislation (what, where, when?);
- B. Detailed information about eligible costs;
- C. Collect proposals for next period that TNC would be provided with a more concrete list of actions and expenditures allowed (a separate measure?).

2.2. Funding of common costs

Background:

Common costs are cooperation coordination and activities shared among partners. The Guide on the measure cooperation suggests that the funding of these costs is shared among partners on the basis of the cooperation agreement.

An invoice related to common costs is examined by different authorities with a risk of contradictory decisions taken. A simplification proposed during the last Leader sub committee is to attribute the common costs to the programme of the coordinating LAG. This will imply that each type of expenditure is attributed to a single programme with no risk of contradictory decisions taken.

Problem:

Bureaucratic and long period to examine common costs by different MS authorities and to avoid double financing or contradictory decisions are made.
Different definition or interpretation of common costs.

Proposals for solution: (tbd)

- A. Detailed information about eligible costs in MS legislation (what, where, when?)
- B. To attribute the common costs to the programme of the coordinating LAG

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3. Information needs of different partners involved in TNC implementation (identifying emerging projects, information about procedures and eligibility rules applied in all programmes, running projects)

3.1. What are the information needs?

Background:

Sharing information could be one possible way for facilitating cooperation, in different phases of the project cycle. It is therefore important to identify which are the needs for information and possible tools for sharing it.

Problem:

Information exchange about TNC projects between MS and regions is not functioning. There is lack of information about different rules, timing of open-calls, approval of projects and the way to monitor the process.

Proposals for solution: (tbd)

- A. Detailed info about rules, eligible costs, time of open-calls available;
- B. List of people responsible for TNC information in MA or PA;
- C. To find a way to simplify the processes.

3.2. Information exchange between Managing Authorities delivering transnational cooperation grants

Background:

According to Article 39.5 of Regulation (EC) 1974/2006 "Member States shall communicate to the Commission the approved TNC projects in order to facilitate at EU level an exchange of information. It was decided that the notifications should be sent by the MS via SFC 2007.

During Leader+ it could be observed that late approval of TNC projects by some of the Managing Authorities involved postponed the start of the projects. Managing Authorities did in general not exchange information on their approvals bi- or multilaterally or had difficulties to exchange information mainly due to linguistic barriers.

Until now no approved projects have been notified through SFC 2007 using the information exchange form annexed to the Guide for the implementation of the Measure "Cooperation", although we have indications that 36 TNC projects have already been approved (situation on 25 November 2009).

There might be other ways to exchange information between MAs involved or between cooperation partners.

The Focus Group could also explore ways to facilitate the information exchange (e.g. to establish a European list of national coordinators for TNC at MA level)

Problem:

Information exchange about TNC projects between MS and regions is not functioning. There is lack of information about approval of the projects and the way to monitor the process.

Proposals for solution: (tbd)

- A. Contact list of responsible national authorities could be made available on the internet;
- B. List of dates of MS when next approval decisions will be taken put on internet website;.
- C. Contact list of links to MS internet websites where decisions will be made public.
- D. Improve the use of SFC.

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4. What are the key areas in which cooperation projects are most needed - what issues and how would that fit or contribute to the regional/national EU strategy?

Background:

- Actions and areas where local level and people to people approach gives better results than top-down approach. For example?
- Actions in which small-scale and local knowledge is more efficient than huge funding and use of external experts. For example?
- TNC projects have to meet locally defined needs and objectives. This is not necessarily in contradiction with the regional/national EU strategy but might complement to their objectives.
- To be continued...