



Fit for the future

A guide for effective FLAGs



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Introduction: The FLAG as the engine of local development



The people behind each FLAG and their local development strategy are the most important resource that community-led local development (CLLD) relies upon. The work of a Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) goes beyond simply selecting projects and delivering grants. The true added value of a FLAG lies in its dedicated team that can generate ideas and mobilise community members to launch projects that would not happen with a traditional, top-down approach to socio-economic development. Ensuring that the right team is in place is, therefore, fundamental to this local development process.

Funded by the European Structural Funds¹, FLAGs are set up to help fisheries and coastal communities identify and prioritise the challenges they should tackle, and the opportunities they should seize, to make their area a better place to live and work. FLAGs are responsible for design and implementation of a participative local development strategy for their area, and ensuring it is put into action thanks to different activities and projects by community members.

While the following points reflect just part of what FLAGs might undertake, these fundamental tasks that they must carry out are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) for 2021-2027 and include:²

- › Building the capacity of local actors
- › Drawing up project selection procedures and criteria
- › Preparing and publishing calls for project proposals
- › Selecting operations and fixing the amount of support
- › Monitoring progress
- › Evaluating results

FLAGs are made up of partnerships of different public and private stakeholders in, or linked to, the local area. These are set up in different ways but will always include a group of individuals who make up the decision-making body, often known as the FLAG board. In some countries, FLAGs also bring together a broader group of members, making up a General Assembly. These, and most board members tend to be volunteers who invest their time to bring positive change to their community.

However, FLAGs also rely on a salaried team to run the group on a daily basis. The FLAG team dedicate their time to the tasks mentioned above, amongst others. Members of the board support and guide the FLAG staff's work and, most importantly, are responsible for decision-making. This includes the selection of local projects that shall receive FLAG funding.

1 The EFF in 2007-2013; EMFF in the 2014-2020; and EMFAR in 2021-2027.

2 Article 33 of the [Common Provisions Regulation for 2021-2027](#)

This Guide recognises the vital role that both FLAG members and staff play in driving local development in fisheries and aquaculture areas. Specifically, it seeks to highlight the importance of the different parts of FLAG work, and aims to provide inspiration to FLAGs on how to do them better. It covers the following key themes:

- ✓ Community animation
- ✓ Supporting and selecting the best projects for the area
- ✓ Efficient administration and management
- ✓ Communicating FLAG work and results
- ✓ Monitoring FLAG activities to adapt and improve operations
- ✓ The human resources that need to be secured to make all this happen!

1. An active FLAG: Animation as the heart of FLAG work



Making change happen on the ground is not an easy task and cannot be done by the FLAG team alone. Projects and activities envisaged in the local strategy will have to be implemented by community members. It is not enough to rely on those who are already active and willing to help. The FLAG will need to reach out to others, who might need encouragement and support to present projects for funding or to participate in other ways in strategy implementation. This outreach work in the community is called “**animation**”. It aims to **mobilise individuals and organisations to generate new ideas and undertake activities to benefit the local community**.

Animation is one of the key factors that distinguishes CLLD from top-down approaches and brings out the added value of local development. It is also extremely context-specific and must be adapted to the specific situation of a fisheries area. There are no “one size fits all” solutions for animation activities!

When planning animation, the FLAG will have to take into account many factors, including the level and types of business and civic activity already happening in the area, as well as the main stakeholders targeted. Animation at the strategy development phase will also be different to animation for specific types of projects.

1.1 Adapting animation to the level and type of activity in your area

In terms of the level of activity, FLAGs can face very different situations. For example:

Little activity in the area (few citizen’s initiatives, few NGOs, little cooperation between businesses).

- Priority number 1 (even before starting to work on the strategy): “**wake up**” the community:
 - ✓ Organise meetings
 - ✓ Identify leaders
 - ✓ Create opportunities for joint action
 - ✓ Support the creation of local associations or community groups

Active but isolated organisations and businesses (they exist but do not talk to each other and often do not even know each other exist).

- FLAG focus: **facilitate exchange and cooperation** between those actors.
 - ✓ Get them involved during strategy development
 - ✓ Organise networking events
 - ✓ Encourage joint projects to facilitate synergies

Good cooperation between some organisations, but a significant part of the community remains passive.

- The FLAG can **build on the experience and contacts of the more active stakeholders** to broaden the outreach and involve other stakeholders.
 - ✓ Targeted approach for some types of stakeholders
 - ✓ Matching interests between active organisations and “non-activated” stakeholder groups
 - ✓ Involving those active organisations to build the capacity of others

The importance of linkages

One of the key aspects of a FLAG’s added value is its ability to create linkages. Thus, animation should not only result in bringing stakeholders closer to the FLAG, but also in bringing **different local stakeholders closer to each other**.

One way to achieve greater linkages is for the FLAG to ensure that local stakeholders have a chance to meet and get to know each other. However, getting several stakeholders together in a meeting is not enough to foster genuine linkages between them; the FLAG must also help to build trust and willingness to cooperate and to undertake joint action. There are several methods to achieve this, for example:

- ✓ By organising events where participants have the opportunity not only to meet each other, but also to **undertake an activity together**, for example cooperation fairs, speed-dating events, or Hackathons.
- ✓ By prioritising support to **projects involving several stakeholders**, ideally from different sectors (e.g., public, private, business, NGO, etc.) – see Chapter 2 below.



Reflect

- Has the level of activity (of citizens, associations, and businesses) in your area changed over the years as a result of FLAG animation?
- Has the FLAG facilitated the creation of permanent forms of cooperation (for example, multi-stakeholder organisations or fishers' association)?

1.2 Adapting animation to different stakeholders

Different stakeholders will have different interests and availability and will access information in different ways. FLAGs will, therefore, have to approach different stakeholders in distinct ways.

Active fishers

Fishers are often out at sea and not physically present in the area. Typically, they can also be less interested in strategic discussions or online consultations. **Small meetings** at convenient locations (for example, in the harbour) might be more attractive. It is important that the people who contact them have good knowledge of the fishing sector and speak their language – consider, for example, asking retired fishers to help. Having a **regular presence** at places such as fishing ports or fish auctions can also help the FLAG maintain links with the sector. Some FLAGs have found it useful to take fishers on **study visits** to other FLAG areas, to show them how certain issues they face have been addressed elsewhere and to encourage them to undertake new activities.



FLAG example: involving the fishing sector

In France, the **Marennes-Oléron FLAG** has **employed an expert** with a good understanding of both the fisheries and research sectors to ensure the involvement of fishers in discussions preparing the setting up of a Marine Natural Park.

Business managers

While they are often essential in terms of diversification of economic activities and job creation, business managers are generally busy and can be sceptical of big meetings and long discussions. They may also be wary of disclosing too much information to competitors. **One-to-one meetings** leading to clearly defined outcomes can be useful, as well as activities which offer **tangible benefits** (such as promotional opportunities) – at least at the early stages of their involvement with the FLAG. Encouraging SME managers to get involved in projects can also be challenging and may require a lot of patience. **Networking events** to develop useful contacts and learn what other businesses are doing can help engage private sector stakeholders and encourage innovative action and partnerships.

Public sector entities

These might include local authorities, educational institutions, authorities of protected areas, as well as several others. Most will have an inherent interest in supporting improvements to the local area, however, depending on the cultural context, they may need to be approached in a **more formal way**, for example, in writing, and potentially by the FLAG president. It may also be important to take into account the **hierarchy of the organisation**. Even when maintaining a working contact with a designated person, it might be good practice keeping superiors (for example, the mayor or director) in the loop too. Giving such entities a **prominent role in public meetings** and other communication opportunities might be welcomed.

Local associations and other NGOs

These tend to be more flexible and willing to cooperate than fishers or businesses. They often have limited physical and financial resources but can be a valuable source of **ideas and volunteers**, so it is useful to involve them and ask them for help, for example, when **organising events**.

People at risk of exclusion

Those struggling with poverty, long-term unemployment, or disabilities, but also potentially women, ethnic minorities and other groups may not be used to participating in large meetings or expressing their views in public. However, it is essential to involve many of these groups in order to address some of the key challenges of a local area. Careful thought will, therefore, need to be put in to designing specific animation activities to help identify the needs of certain groups, along with their aspirations and ideas. For this, the FLAG might have to work with **experienced support organisations** and foresee additional support for those who might be directly involved in the implementation of projects.

These are just a few examples of stakeholder groups that the FLAG may want to involve through animation activities. However, not all stakeholders have to be involved to the same extent! For some, it is enough if they are aware of the FLAG and its strategy and occasionally join some of its activities. The FLAG should focus its animation primarily on two types of stakeholders: those that might **implement projects** that benefit the whole community, and those that can **provide support to the FLAG** in its own activities.



Reflect

- > Have you noticed an increased involvement of particular stakeholders over the years? Which animation activities helped to make this happen?

TIP



Develop a simple animation plan, perhaps on an annual basis, that would identify, for each year, key stakeholders to focus on and the most suitable activities to reach them.

1.3 Adapting animation to the stage of the strategic process

Different animation activities may be needed for different stages of the life of the FLAG, such as the development of the first local strategy, its implementation, evaluation of results, developing a new strategy (or updating the existing one) and so on.

Development of first local development strategy

Focus on getting as many actors involved as possible, with particular effort on key stakeholders, such as the fisheries or aquaculture sector.

*Different formats of **meetings**, large-scale as well as small, informal, one-to-one meetings will be essential here, as well as a good **communications campaign**.*

When taking strategic decisions

When defining objectives, setting targets, developing project selection criteria etc., the FLAG should monitor the level of involvement of different stakeholders to ensure a key group concerned by the strategy is not left out of the process.

*Take **direct contact** with such groups to understand any barriers to their participation. Consider first, who is the **best person** to contact such stakeholders (e.g., the FLAG manager, or one of the members?). Some may be more willing to get involved if they are given a **specific function**, such as leading a specific working group.*

Strategy implementation

Many animation activities will focus on animating potential project promoters. On top of broad communication about the support available, it is also important to identify people who have the potential to implement good projects and to encourage them to apply.

*Animation at this stage involves **informal exchanges** with fishers, SME managers and other potential beneficiaries, as well as creating **opportunities to develop creative ideas** for projects (brainstorms, hackathons, etc.)*

Towards the end of implementation

The FLAG should animate different groups of stakeholders to **reflect on the successes and failures** and share their views, in order to contribute to the evaluation and to help develop a better strategy and action plan in the next period.

*This might involve **focus groups** and/or **interviews with different stakeholders**, amongst others. See [Chapter 5](#) for more ideas.*



Reflect

- > At which stage of the process were the animation activities most useful in your area? Did they lead to new ideas, committed partners, bringing onboard sceptics?



Animation toolbox

- > **Meetings:** a very flexible tool that can be used at all stages of implementation, but their format (size, location, timing etc.) needs to be adapted to specific stakeholders (e.g., village meetings for the wider public, small or one-to-one meetings with the business sector or to discuss project ideas, etc.).
- > **Working groups:** usually involve a small group of stakeholders with relevant knowledge or expertise, who communicate regularly to work more in depth on a specific issue or theme and develop proposal for action.
- > **Study visits:** taking a group of local stakeholders on a visit to another fisheries area (within your country or abroad) can provide learning, inspiration, and increased readiness to try new solutions. It can also help build trust between stakeholders participating in such a visit.
- > **Events aiming to stimulate new ideas,** designed to broaden the participants' minds and challenge them to come up with new solutions (Hackathons, innovation camps, inspirational events, etc.).
- > **Cooperation fairs and matchmaking events,** designed to help local stakeholders find partners for joint initiatives or projects.

The last two types of tools can be particularly helpful at the initial stages of developing project ideas. Further FLAG support to such potential projects is described in [Chapter 2](#).

***Communication activities** can also increase the involvement of stakeholders and are discussed in more detail in [Chapter 4](#).*

2. A discerning FLAG: Supporting and selecting high quality projects



The quality of projects supported by the FLAG will depend, to a large extent, on the skills and motivation of the project promoters, but this does not mean that the FLAG does not have a role to play here!

Its role is particularly important in:

- › Developing selection criteria to prioritise the best projects
- › Developing simple and transparent selection procedures
- › Preparing and publishing calls for projects
- › Supporting beneficiaries to develop and implement projects

The work of the FLAG can make a big difference to project quality!

2.1 Project selection criteria

FLAGs have an important role to play in selecting **projects which are sustainable** and **bring benefits to the community** in areas identified as priorities in its strategy. For this, it is important to have effective selection criteria in place.

Selection criteria are usually defined at the start of strategy implementation. They are often included in the local development strategy or the accompanying action plan and should respond directly to strategic objectives, ensuring that the selected projects help make the strategy become a reality.

There can be many different types of selection criteria. However, most FLAGs will try to have criteria that stipulate **basic conditions** that all projects have to meet in order to be funded **and** criteria that point to the **quality** of a project, including its expected contribution to the FLAG's strategy.

Criteria defining conditions

These criteria can usually be answered with a “Yes” or a “No”, and often can take the form of a simple “checklist” that needs to be verified before a more detailed analysis of the project is undertaken, for example

- › Is the project eligible for funding?
- › Does the project contribute to at least one strategic objective of the FLAG?
- › Is the beneficiary located in the fisheries area, or does it have a clear link with the area? ³
- › Does the project comply with environmental requirements?
- › Does the project capitalise on local resources?
- › Is the application form correctly completed and submitted on time?

Quality criteria

Criteria indicating **preferred** characteristics of the project. These will help prioritise projects. Some may be answered with “Yes/No”, others might need to be scalable, with more or less points attributed depending on the extent to which a project meets the criteria, for example:

- › Involvement of fishers.
- › Cooperation of two or more partners/sectors.
- › Employment creation
- › Is the project promoter a young person (e.g., under 30)?
- › (To what extent) does the project bring something new to the area?
- › (To what extent) does it improve the environmental sustainability of the area?

As well as attributing more points to certain criteria, FLAGs can also establish thresholds, for example, the minimum number of points that a candidate needs to obtain (either overall or by category) in order to receive funding.

However, irrespective of the criteria established, it is important that all the criteria and their weighting should be publicly available and communicated before the potential beneficiaries start preparing their applications.

The project criteria below come from the [Pontevedra FLAG](#) in Spain and show clearly that certain criteria are considered more important than others and, as such, carry more potential points.

³ Beneficiaries do not have to be located in the FLAG area but their project should benefit the area.

Pontevedra FLAG: Project selection criteria and prioritisation



WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM FLAG FUNDING?

Investment projects (which should create employment) and non-profit initiatives of public interest are assessed and scored against the following criteria.

SELECTION CRITERIA	Points for Investment projects	Points for Non-profit projects	SELECTION CRITERIA	Points for Investment projects	Points for Non-profit projects
Sustainability of the project and fit with the FLAG strategy / Technical quality and sustainability	Max 22 (Min 16)	Max 32 (Min 18)	Job creation	Max 20	
Technical viability, includes training and experience of the project promotor	Max 5 (Min 3)	Max 5 (Min 3)	Net employment creation	Max 8	
Economic viability / Management plan	5	5	< 25 000 € per job generated	8	
Financial viability	5	5	25 000 – 50 000 € per job generated	6	
Fit with the strategy	Max 7 (Min 4)	Max 17 (Min 5)	50 000 – 75 000 € per job generated	4	
Characteristics of the candidate	Max 22	Max 20	75 000 – 100 000 € per job generated	2	
Belonging to a disadvantaged group	Max 6	Max 4	> 100 000 € per job generated	0	
Disabled, long-term unemployed, returned emigrants	6	-	Employment creation in disadvantaged groups	Max 8	
Woman or, in the case of entity, parity in the representative bodies	4	4	>50% employment from disadvantaged groups	8	
Male aged < 30	3	-	50 – 25% employment from disadvantaged groups	4	
Social economy entity (scope of action):	-	Max 4	Commitment to maintaining employment (for newly created companies, local employment creation)	4	
The whole FLAG area	-	4	Impact of the project on the area	Max 23	Max 35
Supra-municipal (> 1 municipality)	-	2	Use of local resources or services to the population	3	8
Local project	-	0	Environmental impact, economic effort towards energy efficiency, environmental awareness, or landscape improvement	Max 10	Max 15
Candidate from the fisheries sector	10	6	New technologies and modernisation of production	5	5
Individual or collective project	2	2	Social impact of projects including heritage recovery	2	2
Priority groups the project aims to support	Max 3	Max 3	Dissemination and communication strategy	3	5
Specific measures promoting equality and the integration of groups with specific difficulties	3	3	Innovation and transfer	Max 10	Max 10
			Innovation	4	4
			Transfer	3	3
			Involvement of youth: incorporates educational entities or associations of parents	3	3

The **Opale Coast FLAG** selects projects based on discussion and consensus. The criteria used in its evaluation of projects include the following:



Opale Coast FLAG: Project selection criteria

Project's fit with the FLAG's strategy

- Does the project contribute to other **local policies**?
- Does it respond to several **strategic objectives** of the FLAG?
- Does it bring **innovation** to the area (technical, social, community or methodological)
- Does it involve innovations that can be **transferred** to other areas?
- Can the project serve as an **example / be replicated** by others?
- Does the project create or maintain **jobs** in the area?

Viability of the project

- What are the **direct and indirect impacts and developments** of the project?
- Is the **timeline realistic**?
- Is the **budget realistic** and **value for money**?
- Does the candidate have the necessary **capacity**?
- Will the project be **sustained long-term**?

Implementation of the project

- Does the project bring together the **relevant partners**?
- Are the means and methods **coherent and efficient**?
- Are **communication** activities foreseen?
- Are **evaluation** activities foreseen?

Specific EMFF criteria

- Does it contribute to **sustainable development**?
- Does it respect **gender equality**?
- Does it have a **social, economic and/or environmental** dimension?

Specific criteria by action

- Is it a **collaborative** project?
- Will it **improve the organisation of the fisheries sector**?

The role of the FLAG in drawing up selection criteria to fit the area's needs, and its role in assessing to what extent a given project might address these needs, constitutes a major added value of the CLLD approach. Rather than being a box-ticking exercise that could be done by a remote administrator, **project selection is in the hands of a local partnership with the knowledge to be able to judge qualitatively** the contribution a project may bring to the area.



Reflect

- To what extent have the criteria used by your FLAG in 2014-2020 been helpful in selecting the best projects?
- Which ones would you like to keep and which need to be changed?

TIP



Make sure the project selection criteria chosen can realistically be assessed by the selection committee members!



More information about designing project selection criteria to achieve strategic objectives can be found in [FARNET Guide #11: Results-oriented CLLD in fisheries areas](#), Factsheet 4, Section 2, "Achieving results through project selection".

2.2 Selection procedures

A transparent and effective project selection process is fundamental to justifying the FLAG's legitimacy to take decisions on which local actions should receive funding and to building up its recognition as a valuable support mechanism for local development. If the process of selecting projects is considered too lengthy or unfair, the purpose and credibility of the FLAG can be seriously undermined.

In some countries it can take less than one month from when a potential beneficiary applies for funding to when they receive confirmation of the FLAG's decision.

Ideally, the selection procedure should be designed, together with the criteria and the application process, at the stage of strategy development. Normally such a procedure should provide the following information:

One or two-stage process?

Some FLAGs invite applicants to submit a short outline of their project (an "expression of interest"), to avoid unnecessary paperwork on projects which are unlikely to receive funding; other FLAGs only assess complete applications.



FLAG example: two-stage selection

In the **Marennes-Oleron FLAG** in France, potential applicants first submit a short description of the project proposal to the FLAG. They only move on to develop a fully-fledged application if the idea is approved.

How are the projects presented?

In some FLAGs, projects are presented in person by the applicants (who then leave the room while the selection committee debates the project and proceeds to selection or rejection). In others, the FLAG staff might present the projects, or debate might simply be based directly on the project applications submitted and circulated for reading in advance by the selection committee members.

Who will take the decision?

In most FLAGs, decisions on project selection are taken by the board but, in some countries, decision-making bodies are separate from FLAG boards. There can also be different decision thresholds, for example, in Estonia, projects over a certain budget must be selected by the General Assembly of all FLAG members.

TIP



Ensure all members of the decision-making body fully understand the objectives of the local strategy!

How will decisions be made?

In some countries the FLAG's scoring of each project is carried out individually by each member of the decision-making body, in others a technical scoring is undertaken by the staff and submitted to the members of the selection committee. However, the final decision is usually taken during a meeting, after a discussion on the different projects. Decisions may be reached by voting or consensus. The assessment of each project by several members of the FLAG body (and specific rules in case their scores diverge significantly) is one of the ways to increase objectivity.

Are there any specific rules?

Procedures to avoid conflict of interest should be described (for example, FLAG members must not vote for projects they are involved in and are generally asked to leave the room at the time of voting). In some countries representatives of the MA or IB also take part in the decision-making body meetings, but without the right to vote.

When and where will the results be published?

The procedure can specify where and how soon the decisions will be published, and applicants should be informed that they can appeal the decision, if relevant.

Tailoring procedures

In many places, the project selection procedures do not vary from one type of project to another. However, in certain cases, it can make sense to adapt procedures to better fit the type of project or project promoter concerned, for example:

- ✓ **“Own projects”** (projects the FLAG initiates and may implement itself) – **transparency** of the procedures will be particularly important here.
- ✓ **Cooperation projects** with other FLAGs (which may be implemented by the FLAG or by another organisation on behalf of the FLAG) – **flexibility** so that the procedures fit in with other FLAGs' schedules might be important here.
- ✓ **Small-scale projects** – **simplified procedures** might be necessary.

Own projects

Own projects are often proposed by the FLAG staff and then selected, as any other project, by the board before being sent to the managing authority for formal approval. This is also the case with many cooperation projects. However, in some countries, certain projects to be implemented by the FLAG are already described in the local development strategy.

Own projects might be implemented for specific types of actions, such as training or pilot projects, or when facing difficulties in identifying local organisations willing or able to implement certain ideas. This was the case for the **Costa da Morte FLAG** in Spain, which **launched an online platform** to jointly market fish from all seven of the area's fishing organisations (*cofradías*). Once the project proved to be effective, the FLAG transferred the management of the platform to one of the *cofradías*.

FLAG example: A specific budget and procedure for “own projects”

The **Western Almeria FLAG** in Spain has reserved part of its project budget for initiatives undertaken by the FLAG itself. These projects must be one of the following types: **training, promotion, cooperation or encouraging equality**.

The selection procedure is the same as their standard selection process but, in addition, the General Assembly is consulted for their opinion. The steps are as follows:

1. Upon hearing the needs from different local sectors, the FLAG staff proposes its own projects to the Board, for example training requested by fisheries sector.
2. The Board presents the proposals to the General Assembly, for their information and opinion.
3. The Board approves (or rejects) the proposals to be submitted to the IB.
4. When the call for projects is published, the FLAG submits these own proposals to the IB for formal approval.
5. The IB approves, rejects, or asks for corrections to the project.

One such project is a cooperation project with the **Pontevedra FLAG** to explore opportunities linked to species landed by the local fleet due to the introduction of a “discard ban”. The study will be carried out by the local University.

FLAG example: Other procedures for selecting “own projects”

In Poland, FLAGs can implement their “own projects”, but they first need to verify there is no other organisation in the community willing and able to carry out this activity. Information about the planned project is, therefore, published on the FLAG website and if no entity expresses interest within 30 days, the IB can approve the project in the same way as projects selected by the FLAG.

Getting the selection criteria and procedures fit for purpose is essential to getting the right projects selected. However, the **reputation of the members of the decision body and their skills in applying these criteria and procedures** are also extremely important, both for securing legitimacy of the decisions taken and for getting the right kind of projects supported. Providing strategic orientation to the members of the selection committee can, therefore, be very important.

FLAG examples: Strategic focus of the decision-making body

The **Morenka FLAG** in Poland wanted to encourage all project promoters to take into account environmental, including biodiversity, objectives. It has involved its decision-body members in a training conference on the area’s environmental assets, to make sure they have a good understanding of this topic when assessing project applications.

The **Marennes-Oleron FLAG** starts the meetings of its project selection committee with a short overview of strategy implementation so far and a discussion on the need to devote special efforts to any particular objective.

The Finnish LAG SEPRA (which manages the **South Finland FLAG**) devotes the first board meeting each year to discussing strategic direction to help focus the project selection process.

Reflect

- In some urban LAGs, the voting on projects is open to all the inhabitants of a given area/district. Would this procedure work in your FLAG area? Would it be desirable?

2.3 Preparing and publishing calls for projects

The Common Provisions Regulation for 2021-2027 states that FLAGs must prepare and publish calls for projects. The selection procedure is closely linked with the types of calls published. The frequency and timing of the selection committee meetings will depend on whether there is an **open call** (applicants can submit applications at any time) or **periodic calls**, for example, once a year.

Ensuring that such calls are published **and widely promoted** is essential to ensuring that information reaches all potential candidates. This active promotion of funding opportunities is another added value of the CLLD approach and explains its ability to mobilise stakeholders that might never had applied for public funds previously.



FLAG examples: flexible organisation of calls in Cantabria, Spain

In the Spanish region of Cantabria, the FLAGs can decide whether they organise open or periodic calls for projects. In **Western Cantabria**, where demand for FLAG funding is lower, the FLAG operates an open call system, accepting project applications throughout the programming period. Depending on the number of submissions at a given time and urgency of the candidates' funding needs, the FLAG will call a selection committee meeting to assess the projects presented and select those that best fit their local strategy.

- › This allows the FLAG to be flexible and responsive to needs of potential beneficiaries.

In **Eastern Cantabria**, given the high demand for FLAG funding, the group opens a call for projects at the beginning of each year. The call is published on the websites of the area's four local councils, as well as on the FLAG's website, and is promoted with an intensive communication campaign in the written press and local TV and radio. The call remains open for around five to six weeks.

- › This system allows the FLAG to compare all project proposals at the same time and prioritise those that are expected to have the most impact in the area.



More suggestions concerning project selection procedures can be found in Chapter 4 of [FARNET Guide #19: Delivering CLLD effectively](#).

2.4 Support to project development and implementation

Project development

Animation activities can help generate new ideas in the area and motivate community members to propose projects. However, to generate good projects a **proactive approach and close support** to potential project promoters may be needed.

The FLAG should identify which projects might best contribute to reaching strategic objectives and find promoters with a good chance of success. In some cases, the projects might already be outlined in the LDS, but the FLAG still has to find stakeholders who are capable of implementing them effectively. In other cases, the ideas for projects emerge during the implementation period.

Usually, the FLAG team and key members of the partnership liaise with representatives of the relevant sectors (fisheries, tourism, education, etc.) and work hand-in-hand with them to make sure their project fits into the strategy and has a good chance of meeting eligibility and quality criteria. FLAG mediation may also be needed between stakeholders from different sectors to help develop **collective projects**.

FLAG support at the stage of preparing project applications is particularly **vital for harder-to-reach sections of the community**, with fewer skills or little experience in applying for public funds. Potential applicants may only have a very general idea about what they would like to do (for example, developing a new line of products or opening a restaurant), and even if such ideas may have strong potential to contribute to the FLAG's strategic objectives, project promoters may need help to envisage all the steps necessary to make their idea a reality. The same is true for ensuring they can describe the project in terms of **objectives, activities, timeline, costs**, and expected **results**. FLAG staff or more experienced partners may need to advise them in this process.



FLAG example: Support to applicants

The **West-Central Sardinia FLAG** in Italy, together with the LEADER LAG Sinis, set up a specialist service to provide information about funding possibilities. The **Sportello Europa Sinis Desk** provides free personalised advice to help companies and associations seize the opportunities of calls for proposals and to find the appropriate support.

Support to applicants may also involve **training** in the formal requirements that FLAG-supported projects have to comply with, as well as helping beneficiaries to fill and submit **application forms** correctly. This is particularly important where the key target groups are finding it difficult to cope with the application process, which can be complex and time-consuming. This might be the case for small-scale fishers, NGOs and micro businesses.

Tailored support from the FLAG can ease the administrative burden and **enable all stakeholders** with the potential to develop and implement projects to apply to the FLAG for funding, not just the “usual suspects” who already have experience with EU funding.

FLAG support to prepare the application for funding can include:

- Support and information on obtaining necessary **licenses**
- Awareness-raising regarding relevant **regulations** that must be complied with (health and safety, environmental, etc.)
- Support for **analysis and viability** studies (either by FLAG staff or by referral to designated professionals)
- Support to mobilise additional **match-funding**
- **Financial support** through agreements with financial entities (e.g., special rate loans with local banks)

- Provision of **monitoring and evaluation** templates – to be built into project development and used throughout implementation
- Specific **training** where necessary (e.g., in IT, accounting, customer service, product development, promotion...)

An essential aspect of many FLAG-supported projects is the **collaboration of different stakeholders**. Such collaboration can enable the pooling of different competencies and resources, and facilitate the exchange of ideas leading to innovative practices.

An important role of the FLAG is to support potential beneficiaries in finding other actors that can become involved in the project. This involvement can take different forms: from informal advice or mentoring to offering the use of buildings or equipment free of charge, as well as sharing responsibility for the project by becoming a formal partner. FLAGs can help initiate contacts and build trust between potential partners.

FLAG examples: facilitating joint projects

The German **Baltic Sea Coast FLAG** has supported **cooperation between different actors** around **a new type of fishing gear** (fish traps to reduce the by-catch of marine mammals and birds). An existing collaboration between fishers and researchers was extended to also involve an environmental NGO, an online fish sales platform and three coastal municipalities which co-financed the project.

Sometimes the FLAG may have to **find a local actor to implement the project on behalf of a group of stakeholders**, as in the case of a **fish-handling centre** supported by the **Kainuu-Koillismaa FLAG**, where the formal beneficiary is the municipality.

Project implementation

Some beneficiaries, especially less experienced ones, may need support from the FLAG to implement their projects in a correct and timely manner, and to fulfil reporting requirements. FLAGs may need to follow the implementation progress and, in case of questions concerning eligibility or changes in the project, they may act as an intermediary between the beneficiary and the MA.

If many issues have been identified during the implementation of projects by beneficiaries, the FLAG may be tempted, in the new period, to develop more restrictive criteria for beneficiaries at project selection. However, it may be better in the long run to select a less experienced project promoter and ensure good support at implementation. This will build capacity at the local level to implement more projects in the future.

Remember: building the capacity of local actors is a core task of Local Action Groups

Reflect

- Which stakeholders are more likely to develop and implement an innovative project idea: new actors that have not been involved with the FLAG before or experienced project promoters?
- How many of your beneficiaries are using EMFF funding for the first time, thanks to FLAG support?



Project support toolbox

- **Information meetings:** Open meetings with potential beneficiaries where general information is provided about the objectives of the call, requirements, deadlines, etc.
- **Training for beneficiaries:** More detailed information meetings, with practical instructions on how to fill the application form, how to fulfil reporting requirements, how to carry out monitoring, etc.
- **Individual consultancy sessions:** More focused on specific issues, such as helping the project promoter develop a business plan or mobilise match funding. It is important to ensure that people who provide this support are not involved in the assessment of the project.
- **Mentoring or coaching:** this could be organised by the FLAG to make sure that first-time beneficiaries get advice and support from more experienced project promoters.
- **Periodic review meetings:** Such meetings are usually organised so that the FLAG can keep track of progress of supported projects. They can also be helpful to the project promoters to identify problems and ask for advice if needed.
- **Helping find partners for collaborative projects:** This can include cooperation fairs, match-making and speed-dating events, online partner search systems, etc.



For further guidance, see [FARNET Guide #21: Nurturing quality projects](#) and [Guide #4: Steps for success](#), Chapter 3 “Active project development and selection”.

3. A well-organised FLAG: Management and administration



While a large part of FLAG work involves animation and outreach activities, the administrative tasks are equally important. FLAGs have a **responsibility for public funding** and they have an important role to play in making sure funds are managed and accounted for correctly.

3.1 What tasks should the FLAG office carry out?

Typically, the administrative tasks are carried out by the staff employed by the FLAG, or – if the FLAG is not a legal entity – by an organisation selected by the partners to represent the FLAG for legal purposes, often a local council or a fishing organisation. These administrative tasks usually include some or all of the following:

Administrative work linked with launching calls and receiving project applications

The FLAG staff must ensure calls are published in the relevant media and should organise a transparent system of receiving and storing applications – be they electronic or on paper. Submission dates of projects, for example, and completeness of information should be recorded and no unauthorised persons should have access to the applications submitted. This work is greatly facilitated with the use of online application tools.

Organising the work of the decision-making body

This ranges from preparing the meetings (physical or online) and providing members with access to the dossiers, to recording all decisions and drafting minutes of the meetings if relevant. It is very important to ensure that all the details of the decision-making process are recorded, including individual votes where relevant as well as abstentions of members with a potential conflict of interest.

Disseminating information and documents concerning project selection

This includes notifying individual applicants, publishing the results and/or minutes of selection committee meetings), ensuring information is correctly stored (on paper and/or in electronic versions, depending on the relevant rules) and can be accessed for purposes of controls and audits, even after the end of the implementation period.

Providing information and answering queries

For example, about the calls for projects from potential applicants, project promoters and members of the decision-making body, as well as the media and other stakeholders.

Organising support for project promoters

The FLAG may provide space for individual consultancy or arrange meetings and training sessions. Depending on the qualifications, some FLAG staff members themselves may provide advice or training to project promoters (otherwise, this can be done by contracted experts or experienced volunteers).

Organising events

These might include information meetings about the local strategy or for potential project promoters; promotional events, attending festivals and fairs with information about the FLAG area or its products, etc. Some of these tasks can be carried out by partner organisations, but in general there is likely to be an important role for the FLAG team in the organisation of such events. This activity also includes participation in networking and capacity building events organised for FLAGs by the National Network, FARNET or other organisations.

Managing communication activities

Most FLAGs have a website that needs to be managed, many prepare and disseminate regular newsletters. See [Chapter 4](#) for further information on communication activities.

Reporting on FLAG activities

FLAGs will be expected to deliver reports on their work (usually both narrative and financial) to the managing authority. However, they may also want to inform the local community on FLAG activities and the utilisation of FLAG funding.

General management tasks

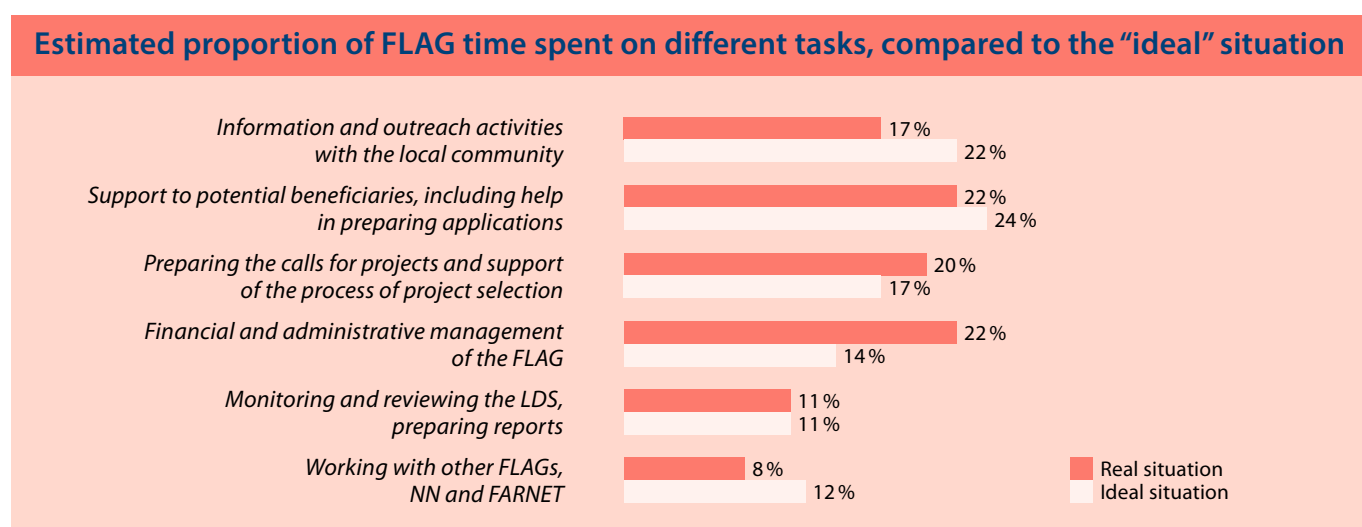
As in most organisations, FLAGs will usually need to take care of general office management, accounting, human resource management, internal communication, etc.

Monitoring and evaluation

See [Chapter 5](#) on monitoring and evaluating FLAG work and strategy implementation.

Most FLAGs will try to keep a balance between the different types of tasks and in particular aim to ensure that administrative tasks do not eat up precious time that could be devoted to outreach and support to potential beneficiaries. For this, administrative work must be **well organised, with simple and efficient procedures** in place. FLAGs may have to work closely with their managing authority to ensure the administrative requirements are kept to a minimum and duplication of tasks is avoided.

The graphic below illustrates the amount of time surveyed FLAGs estimated to spend on their different tasks, along with the ideal situation in their opinion. In most cases, FLAGs felt that administrative tasks took up too much time, leaving insufficient time for community outreach. This underlines the importance of administration being as efficient and streamlined as possible.



Source: 2019 FARNET survey of FLAGs on delivery systems

Implementing own projects

The FLAG office may also be involved in the implementation of those projects where the **FLAG itself is the beneficiary**, for example cooperation projects with other FLAGs. These can include a wide range of activities such as:

- > organising exchanges and study visits
- > preparing and disseminating publications
- > organising conferences, workshops, peer learning events
- > carrying out surveys and studies
- > and many others

The remuneration of staff members involved in such additional tasks, often requiring a high level of technical knowledge, usually comes **from the budget of the relevant project**, and not from the general budget for running and animation costs.

3.2 How to organise the work of the FLAG?

Efficient and transparent FLAGs

Some FLAGs are managed by public sector entities, others are set up as NGOs or non-profit companies. However, all FLAGs are in some way participating in the delivery of EU funding to local actors and as such they are **responsible for public funds**, either directly (e.g., running and animation costs) or indirectly (supported projects).

It is essential that FLAGs are organised to foster efficient and transparent use of public funds!

This means that FLAGs should pay particular attention to:

- ✓ Ensuring **cost efficiency** of all expenses, including the costs linked with running the office, staff, transportation, communications, and purchase of goods and services. Even when these expenses do not require public procurement procedures, it is good practice, where possible, to compare the offers of several providers of goods and services.
- ✓ Taking into account the principles of **social and environmental responsibility** in the FLAG expenses (buying locally sourced products, contracting services provided by social economy organisations, prioritising climate-neutral transport, etc.).
- ✓ Respecting **timelines and deadlines**: this means not only the timely submission of payment claims and reports to the managing authority, but also allowing sufficient time to prepare and submit applications, circulating invitations to meetings and events with adequate notice, etc.
- ✓ Ensuring **transparency** of all FLAG decisions concerning public funds, not only those related to the selection of projects, but also those concerning hiring FLAG employees or purchasing office equipment.
- ✓ Maintaining **good order in documentation** and keeping record of all decisions, including an audit trail to show a clear link between all financial transactions and the relevant decisions, invoices, and other documents.

- ✓ Ensuring **accessibility** of the key persons in the FLAG team (including clear information when they can be contacted by phone or in person) and availability of competent staff to respond to queries by local actors, programme authorities, auditors, media, and others.

Bottom-up, partnership-based FLAGs

Not all the tasks mentioned in section 3.1 have to be carried out by the FLAG staff. An important feature of CLLD is its bottom-up, partnership-based character, which requires the involvement of different stakeholders of the community who all contribute to bringing change to the area.

The involvement of local stakeholders should not be limited to the implementation of projects but should happen also in a FLAG's own work.

The specificity of FLAG work requires a combination of the professionalism and availability of paid staff with the unpaid contribution of volunteers representing partner organisations. It is important to find the **right balance between the professional and the volunteer components**. Maintaining a regular flow of information within the FLAG team and with other partners is essential. Moreover, for the work of FLAG staff and volunteer contributions to be combined smoothly, everybody must be clear on:

- > Who should do what
- > Who is responsible to whom

It is also important that tasks related to FLAG work are shared between different members. This helps ensure **ownership by a broader base of stakeholders** as well as **spreading the burden of work**.

TIP



Consider rotating certain functions between partners and organising small “task groups” responsible for specific activities or themes.



Reflect

- > In what FLAG tasks are the partners most frequently involved? What further activities could volunteers carry out?
- > Do you agree that efficiency and transparency can help build trust with the MA and with local stakeholders? What other ways are there to build trust?



FLAG organisation toolbox

- > **Internal communication tools**, such as internal newsletters, regular meetings (online or physical), circulating visit reports and event notes. Prioritise **regularity** and **simplicity**.
- > **Digital access to documents**. When choosing online tools, prioritise **ease of use** and **security** (from accidental loss of data as well as from hacking or phishing...)
- > **Effective management systems**, for example, for project management, personnel management, financial management, etc. The choice (and decision whether they are needed at all) will largely depend on the FLAG budget, number of staff and degree of administrative complexity but, as a general rule, **well-tested** solutions **acceptable** to the team members should be prioritised.

4. A visible FLAG: Communicating FLAG work and results



Ensuring the effective and professional communication of FLAG work, and the benefits this brings to the territory, is fundamental. It contributes to involving the local population in the FLAG's work, promoting, and supporting the activities carried out by different beneficiaries, and encouraging other project promoters to contribute to the development of the territory with innovative projects. It also plays a strong role in keeping the fisheries sector and other stakeholders on board, and generating the necessary political support for the continuation of public funding for the programme.

Almost all FLAG activities – from animation, to publishing project calls, to capitalising on evaluation results – require specific methods of communication. FLAGs need to study and plan these activities carefully. This may involve the use of a professional communications company where FLAG staff lacks the time or expertise to do this effectively.

Communication should be ongoing and multi-directional – informing primary stakeholders and the general public on a regular basis of FLAG opportunities and results and ensuring that feedback channels are used to gather information on how to improve FLAG work.

Good communication needs a **strategic approach, defined objectives, clear messages, content adapted to target groups and adequate resources!**

4.1 A strategic approach

By a strategic approach we mean that **communication should be an integral part of the FLAG strategy and action plan**. Right from the stage of designing the local development strategy and planning FLAG work it is important to keep in mind:

- ✓ What needs to be communicated (key messages)
- ✓ With whom will the FLAG communicate (target audiences)
- ✓ Why (objectives)
- ✓ How will the FLAG communicate (which channels should be used)
- ✓ When (for maximum impact)

Building communication activities into FLAG work throughout the implementation period is vital. Two key conditions for success are **frequency** and **regularity**: regular updates of the website, presence in the relevant media, and participation in events and communication activities organised by partners should all be taken into account on an on-going basis.

Social media allows you to reach, nurture, and engage with your target audiences. However, it should attract traffic to your website, not to replace it.

Another essential element of the strategic approach is **ensuring that FLAG staff and members are all involved in communications** efforts. Even if the FLAG employs a communications officer, the FLAG manager and president should take an active role in designing and implementing communication activities, making sure that every aspect of the life of your fisheries community is looked at from a communications angle. Other FLAG members may act as “multipliers”, using their own social media accounts to amplify the messages of the FLAG across different platforms.

When developing the contents of your communication activities you should not forget to **showcase projects** supported by the FLAGs and especially their results. Be sure to provide enticing information to draw in your audience – impressive data and achievements, appealing images and if possible, graphs and charts. Do not forget the power of human storytelling – if a project has improved the lives of people, tell their stories! As well as demonstrating how the public funding allocated to the FLAG is being spent, most importantly it can inspire and encourage other local people to present new projects. It also helps beneficiaries promote their initiatives and create linkages.



Keep communications as a standard point on the agenda of FLAG board meetings.

4.2 Contents adapted to target groups

CLLD, by nature, aims to involve and mobilise a broad range of hard to reach groups. This means that communications needs to be tailored to each of these different groups and will depend on the **purpose of the communications and the resulting actions**, for example:

- ✓ Attending an event
- ✓ Contributing ideas
- ✓ Improving knowledge
- ✓ Presenting projects
- ✓ Providing feedback

When FLAGs are designing their communications activities, they should think through each of the main stakeholder groups, the key messages they wish to put across, the information that can best support those messages. FLAGs should also consider the best way of reaching the different groups with the messages and information that are important to them. Below are just a few examples of groups and potential communication objectives and channels.

Target Audience	Communication	Channel
Fishers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Opportunity to propose improvements in the area > Showcasing projects supported for local fishers > Funding opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Radio > Meetings in port > Social media > One-to-one visits
Aquaculture businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Networking opportunities with other industry players > Funding opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Local events > E-mail, telephone > Website
Young people, including recent graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Opportunity to propose improvements in the area > Showcasing start-ups and other initiatives by young people > Funding opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Social media > Website
Marine-related researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Emerging needs for R&D, for example, to address environmental challenges linked to fisheries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Written press > Social media > Website
General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Informing the public of the FLAG's vision for the area > Raising awareness of certain themes, such as the role of fishers in the area > Promoting FLAG work and the results of projects funded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Local media > Billboards > Website > Local fairs > Community meetings

FLAGs should be looking to use both **direct communication channels** (those they control themselves, such as social media, meetings, websites, podcasts, etc.) as well as **indirect channels** (where they rely on others to communicate their stories, for example, media articles, television, and radio coverage). To get coverage in indirect channels, it is important to understand the sorts of stories different outlets like to publish and adapt the FLAG's story to fit their interests.

TIP



Follow up emails you send with phone calls to see if media partners will cover your story and offer any further information.



Example: Podcasts to showcase innovative local projects

The French company **Eureka 21** was created to promote European good practices in sustainable development, for example, through a good practice blog, study visits, training, and benchmarking. From April 2021, in partnership with an independent radio station focusing on European affairs **eu! radio**, it has launched a series of three minute **podcasts** presenting innovative and creative local development projects.

Websites

Most FLAGs have a website, and the **content** and **structure** should also be developed from the perspective of different stakeholder groups. Rather than consider websites as plain and generic, consider what the local environment might add in terms of colours, images, and design features. What aesthetic elements will really reflect the specificity of the FLAG?

Some FLAG websites focus mainly on communicating to potential project promoters and may use very technical terms when communicating about project calls. However, while providing information about project calls is important and contributes to the transparency of FLAG operations, FLAGs can communicate to many other stakeholders beyond potential project promoters. Alongside the more technical aspects, it can help to have “in brief” visualisations where the most important information is made readily available. Quotes and text boxes can help translate the more technical information into more easily understandable forms.

Other target groups might be more interested in interviews and stories of local people, news on the local fisheries sector, stories from other FLAG areas, and short and easily understandable information on policy issues (EU, national, regional...), etc.

TIP



Include links in social media posts to drive visitors to your website, and add a line to web pages suggesting the reader follows you on your social media platforms.

FLAG examples: Website content

The Croatian **Tri Mora FLAG** has a clear and easy to navigate **website structure**, and provides information of interest to the local community. For example, about the most recent versions of **legal acts important for the fisheries** sector, or an announcement about the **initiative of the Croatian LAG network** to collect support for areas affected by the earthquake in December 2020.

The Spanish **Basque FLAG** provides information about the **regional quality label being allocated to their anchovy** fishery, and invites interested stakeholders to an **event presenting a specific project** supported by the FLAG.

The Italian FLAG **Friuli Venezia Giulia** disseminates recent FARNET publications via its website. For example, the **FARNET Magazine** or the results of the **algae survey**, providing in each case a short summary to encourage the readers to click on them.

Internal communications

Communication within the FLAG office and with the FLAG partners is also of high importance. Such communication needs to be regular but the needs of these audiences in terms of contents and channels will be different from those of other stakeholders.

Those involved more directly in FLAG work often want more details about the FLAG’s results and may wish to understand not only its successes but also the barriers and issues encountered in strategy implementation. Consider producing a short **internal newsletter** disseminated to this group of stakeholders. It does not have to be elaborate but can save time in meetings and answering questions. Newsletters can be more useful for busy colleagues with attention-grabbing headlines, a short list of content or a “highlights” section at the beginning.

Reflect

- > Choose a target audience and write down three questions they might want to ask about the activities and achievements of your FLAG. Which communications activities of the FLAG provide responses to these questions?

Toolbox – Communications

- > **Direct communications channels**, such as social media, videos, podcasts, websites, blogs, meetings and events. They are more effective when you identify key messages to communicate, objectives, target audience and the impact you want to achieve.
- > **Indirect communications channels**, for example press releases, media articles, television and radio coverage. Remember to adapt your pitch to their interests.
- > **Content development tools** will largely depend on the channel used and the expectations of your target audience. Make sure you adapt to the channel, for example, short video clips are best for social media, longer ones for YouTube; Twitter posts need to attract attention so use an image with the text you write. User-generated content should be encouraged, in line with the participative character of CLLD.
- > **Visualisation tools** are great for turning complex data or information into easy-to-understand visuals. They can communicate a lot of information more quickly than text and can be helpful for multi-lingual audiences. There are many free online tools to help you create stunning visuals, including **Tableau Public** (which also provides [helpful tips on visuals](#)), **Canva**, and **Google Charts**. Tools like **Datwrapper** help turn project data into interactive maps. Further tips on data visualisation can be found [here](#).
- > **Tools to monitor and measure communication results**, including visitor statistics, user surveys, feedback tools etc. The European Commission has published a toolkit to help design and evaluate communications, including conferences, websites, and social media activities (see page 20 of the document, [here](#)).



See [FARNET Guide #20: Forward-looking strategies for fisheries areas](#), Chapter 4.4 for ideas on planning information and communications activities.

5. A learning FLAG: Monitoring and adapting FLAG work



Once a FLAG starts to receive and select projects and implementation begins, there is important follow-up to carry out on a regular basis. This will allow the FLAG to monitor whether funds are going to the priorities established in the FLAG strategy, if delivery mechanisms are efficient, and if projects are having the expected results. An important part of such monitoring is keeping track of the work of the FLAG. How effective are its activities in animating stakeholders to present projects? Are project promoters receiving the information and support they need? Are the key stakeholder groups aware of the FLAG and its vision for the area?

5.1 Why and what do we want to know about FLAG work?

Monitoring the successes and failures of FLAG work can have several objectives:

- ✓ **Improving performance** by analysing practices and learning what works, what does not, and what can be done better.
- ✓ **Justifying the use of public funding:** Demonstrating that the European and national taxpayers are getting the best value for the funding spent on FLAG running and animation costs.
- ✓ A learning organisation can also help **develop the capacity of FLAG employees.**

When the FLAG puts in place a system of analysing its work, it usually tries to cover some or all of the following elements:

- ✓ **Animation and outreach activities:** encouraging hard-to-reach groups to apply for funding, creating linkages between stakeholders, advice, and support to project promoters.
- ✓ **Project application and selection** process: facilitating access to funding for key target groups, making sure selection procedures are clear and transparent and streamlining decision making.
- ✓ **Administrative and financial** efficacy, including organisation of office work, human resource management, time management, submitting correct documentation (without errors) to the relevant authorities.
- ✓ **Communication** activities. This includes the visibility of the FLAG in the local area (how many people know about its existence, intensity of media coverage), its reputation with the local stakeholders and capacity to disseminate information about funding possibilities.



FLAG example: Feedback from those that did not get support

The SEPRA LAG in Finland carried out a survey to assess the awareness of the local population regarding the LAG and its strategy. Out of six places where the surveys were carried out, three had been included as they had no LAG projects to better understand why.

For each of these areas, the FLAG must decide whether its performance can be assessed by **self-evaluation** or would it require **external input**. Contracting external consultants can provide an objective view but can be costly and sometimes such external experts need extensive briefing to really understand the work of FLAGs. It can, therefore, be very useful to involve other FLAG managers in evaluating, or peer-reviewing, FLAG work.

FLAG examples: Peer reviewing

The French FLAG **Marennes-Oléron** participates in a group of three FLAGs whose managers use the “fresh eye” method. They use a grid covering the following themes:

1. **General organisation** of the FLAG.
2. Organisation of the FLAG **selection board**.
3. Project promoters **support schemes**.
4. Programme **animation**/communications.
5. Monitoring of the **LDS**.

Once these five sections of the grid are filled by all three FLAG managers, they organise a meeting, compare their practices, discuss and draw lessons.

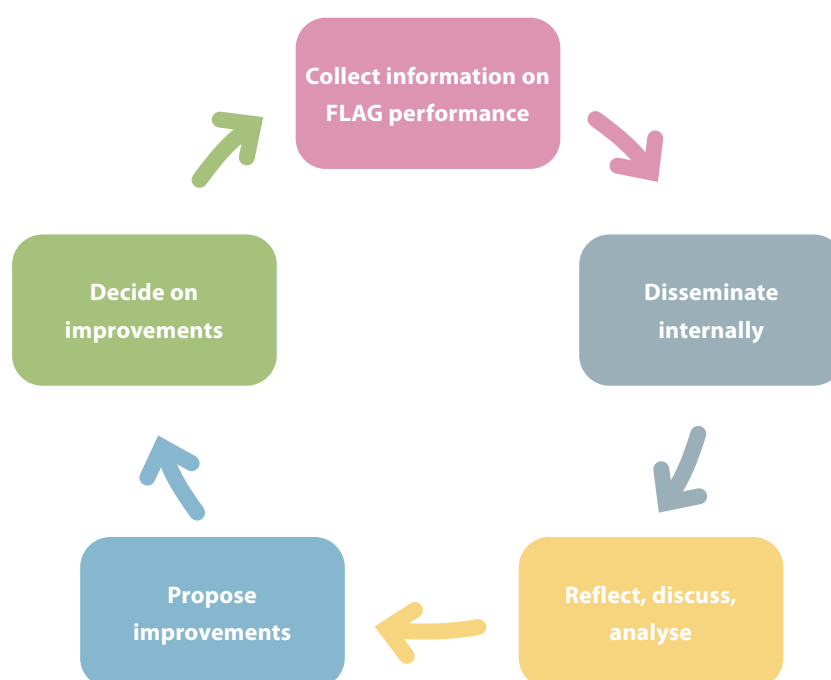
Reflect

- > How would you measure the success of your activities to promote cooperation between stakeholders: by number of participants? Number of follow-up activities? etc.

5.2 Using knowledge

Collecting feedback and analysing the work of your FLAG is only part of the story – the key point is to use this knowledge **to improve your operations**. Thus, collecting information about FLAG performance would only be the first step of the process.

It will be important to disseminate this information within the FLAG team (board members and employees), reflect on it and develop proposals for improvements. These improvements may in some cases require a decision by the General Assembly of the FLAG or – in case of major changes, for example, in the project selection criteria presented in the strategy – by the managing authority. After the change, it is necessary to analyse how the new system is working, so the process is cyclical:



The **reflection** stage is very important and sufficient time should be allowed for it. You might want to ask an experienced facilitator to run this process in order to ensure that all participants are able to express their ideas freely. Be open to a wide range of suggestions for improvements (perhaps in a brainstorm format) before narrowing them down to those that are most realistic and do not involve excessive costs.

LAG example: Reflecting on evaluation results

At the end of the 2007-2013 period, the German LEADER LAG Oberallgäu carried out an extensive survey of all its members and management, and then organised a workshop with external evaluator to discuss the results.

Results of monitoring FLAG work can also be used for reporting to the relevant authorities (for example, to the organisation running the FLAG or to the MA).

FLAG example: Reporting FLAG work to the MA

In the format the Finnish FLAGs use to report to the MA there is a section on **feedback received from beneficiaries** on their assessment of support received. FLAGs have to explain, if needed, how these comments were taken into account (what was changed in FLAG work).

Reflect

- > What are the three most important messages about your FLAG operations that you found out through monitoring and would like to share with your board/GA?

Monitoring FLAG work toolbox:

- > **Surveys:** Can be used with large target groups, e.g., inhabitants of the area, fishers, applicants; particularly useful to collect quantitative information.
- > **Interviews:** Can be face-to-face or by phone/web, useful with small to medium-sized target groups, can collect quantitative and qualitative data.
- > **Focus group meetings:** Are a form of group interviews which allow interaction between respondents and can be useful to obtain in-depth qualitative information.
- > **Event feedback forms:** Typically distributed to participants after events to get their reaction, can also be used to collect broader suggestions for improvements.
- > **Peer to peer tools,** Such as the peer audit or “fresh eye” procedures described above.



The [FARNET Guide #15: Evaluating CLLD – a handbook for LAGs and FLAGs](#) contains useful information on evaluating local development strategies but also FLAG work, including examples of tools such as peer reviews etc.

6. A capable FLAG: Resources and skills



In previous chapters we have discussed a long list of tasks that a FLAG has to carry out in order to ensure successful implementation of the local strategy. However, **what resources does the FLAG need to do all this?**

All organisations need human, technical and financial resources to carry out their work. To function effectively, FLAGs will need adequate office and meeting space, reliable IT systems and equipment, a bank account, etc., but the key resource with which to make a difference is the **FLAG team**: the staff, board members and other people involved in FLAG work.

A FLAG is as good as the people running it: Invest in recruiting the right people; invest in their training; make sure the necessary partners are involved and invested.

6.1 FLAG staff

The drive, creativity and experience of the FLAG staff is fundamental to the success of the local development strategy. It must also be sufficiently resourced to ensure it has the capacity to handle the broad range of tasks involved in running a FLAG. This includes outreach and liaison with key stakeholders, organising the project application process and supporting the work of the selection body, administrative and communications activities, as well as monitoring and evaluating its activities and their results.

Depending on the FLAG's area and available budget, these tasks require a significant input of staff time and a broad range of knowledge and skills. Below are a series of recommendations.

FLAG staff – knowledge and skills

KNOWLEDGE

- › Experience in sustainable territorial development
- › Knowledge of the fisheries and/or aquaculture sector
- › Knowledge of the local area and its key stakeholders
- › Experience in supporting project and business development
- › Knowledge of the relevant rules and legislation
- › Experience and capacity to manage public funding (including EU funds)

SKILLS

- › Excellent communication, networking and teamworking skills: capacity to listen objectively, understand and establish trust with different interest groups
- › Dynamic, accessible and committed to making a difference
- › Leadership and ability to motivate others
- › Imagination, creativity, and flexibility
- › Language skills to facilitate transnational exchange
- › Up-to-date IT skills
- › Driving license and mobility

A new FLAG starting its operations may not easily find local people with all these skills, especially as most FLAGs have rather limited staff budgets, it will be important to plan intensive **skills development** early on. For experienced organisations, whose staff have already developed most of these skills, the main challenge is to make sure they stay in the area and continue working for the FLAG. It will be important to consider various forms of motivation for such employees – not only financial, but also in terms of other benefits, such as recognition, flexible working hours, or opportunities for personal development.

In terms of staff time, most FLAGs have relatively small teams, composed on average of two people.⁴ However, this may not be sufficient. During a FARNET seminar for FLAGs from South-Western Europe in 2014, working groups attempted to estimate how much staff time (in full-time equivalents or FTEs) would be needed for the different tasks in an **ideal situation**:

Animation & community mobilisation	0.5 FTEs
Project development support	0.5 FTEs
Project analysis & selection procedures	0.5 FTEs
Networking & cooperation	0.3 FTEs
Communication	0.3 FTEs
Monitoring & evaluation	0.2 FTEs
Management & coordination	0.2 FTEs
Administration	0.5 FTEs
Total	3 FTEs

This level of staffing may be unrealistic for many FLAGs with low budgets, in which case they may have to outsource certain tasks (e.g., certain communication or evaluation tasks) or rely on the voluntary work of FLAG members for some activities (e.g., networking).

TIP



An open call for projects can save administrative time spent preparing calls every year. It can also allow FLAG staff to manage the flow of projects over time.



Reflect

- > What are the main ways of developing the skills of your FLAG staff: training courses, mentoring, study visits to other organisations?

⁴ In a 2019 FARNET survey of FLAGs, the average number of staff per FLAG was two, ranging from less than a 0.5 full-time equivalent in Denmark and the UK to up to five employees in Italy, Portugal, and Romania.

6.2 FLAG members and other volunteers

The members of the FLAG board are responsible for driving the local development strategy and have a vital role to play as FLAG ambassadors and experts in their respective sectors. Board members are **responsible for decision-making** with regards to projects selected for financial support and, as such, need to be keenly aware of the objectives of the FLAG and representative of the local community. Other volunteers (for example, retired IT specialists, accountants, or journalists) can also make an important contribution to FLAG work.

FLAG members can only contribute to the aims of the local development strategy by allocating time and energy to putting it into action.

Involving the FLAG members and other volunteers in the FLAG's ongoing work can help lever in **additional knowledge and skills as well as strengthening the participatory, bottom-up character of CLLD**. It can also mobilise capacity, for example, through support of an employee from the local council or a fishing association who might contribute to organising a local meeting or communicating to specific stakeholder groups on behalf of the FLAG.

Based on discussion with FLAGs, below are some suggestions of some of the qualities FLAGs might want amongst their members.

FLAG members – skills and resources

Fundamental

- › Availability & commitment
- › Experience & recognition within the local fisheries/aquaculture sector
- › Representativeness & influence in different sectors of the local community
- › Ability to communicate FLAG objectives and opportunities in the community and to foster dialogue and exchange

Ideal

- › Broad range of relevant experience, skills & knowledge
- › Balance between men & women; young & veterans
- › Political neutrality
- › Open minded, curious, and holistic vision
- › Knowledge of the territory
- › Participative mindset and ability to cooperate with others

The number of FLAG board members varies significantly but tends to range between 10 and 20 people. The **time FLAG members have available will vary significantly**: some people will be able to dedicate as much as 1-2 days per month and take part in different activities, others will only be able to spare a few days per year.

Hence, planning FLAG work it will be important to take into account the contribution of FLAG members, other representatives (e.g., employees) of FLAG partners or volunteers to support FLAG work. We could, therefore, try to make an estimate of their involvement, for example:

Task	Estimated no. of people involved	Estimated time
Strategic direction, planning, monitoring, adaptation	15 (FLAG board)	3 days/person/year
Outreach to the community, promoting the strategy, encouraging participation	20 (FLAG board, other partners, and volunteers)	3 days/person/year
Project selection: document analysis and meetings	15 (FLAG board or decision-body)	6 days/person/year
Communication and information	25 (FLAG board, other partners, and volunteers)	2 days/person/year
Meetings, visits, events, representation	40 (FLAG board, other partners and volunteers)	1 day/person/year

The important thing is for FLAG members to **be realistic about the time needed** for given tasks and ensure an effective distribution of this workload among its members, based on their skills, knowledge, and available time.

Reflect

- Do you have all the necessary skills within your FLAG? If not, how will you secure them in the future? Can you train your team? Do you need additional partners with additional skills?