1. Managing Effective Partnerships

1.1 Introduction

Local area based partnerships in the form of Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) are fundamental to the delivery of EFF Axis 4. In implementing Axis 4 through local partnerships there is a clear expectation that local partnerships and community involvement will add value to the development process. The work of these partnerships has a very direct effect on what is achieved in the fisheries area, they combine the strengths and potentials of local actors in identifying and addressing the common issues, opportunities and challenges faced. They form an essential link between the place and the people and institutions involved and affected, they provide a focus for the sense of local identity motivating bottom up involvement and contributing to social capital, they provide the vehicle which translates the vision into the reality that something can and will be done.

The experience from other similar area based initiatives provides evidence that the way in which the partnerships work has a profound effect on what the FLAG achieves and how it contributes to the wellbeing of the area. The effective operation and management of these FLAG partnerships is therefore of great importance to the success of Axis 4 both locally and overall.

This chapter sets out to address some of the more practical aspects of how to operate, manage and maintain a dynamic and balanced working FLAG partnership. The guide provides practical information and advice for FLAGs on issues that need to be considered when establishing and implementing local partnerships, in delivering their development strategies and in managing the involvement of FLAG members and the local community. It takes into account some of the latest recommendations of the European Commission in response to the European Court of Auditors report on LEADER partnerships. This chapter should be read in conjunction with Farnet Guide 1 and in particular Chapter 3 of that guide on ‘Building Local Partnerships’.

1.2 Working in partnership

The meaning and value of partnership

Even though in this chapter we are dealing with a very specific type of partnership in the FLAG it is worth mentioning some of the more generic aspects of partnership working to highlight common relevant principles which contribute to successful partnerships. There is a great deal of information available regarding ‘the nature of partnership’, this can be in guides, in text books or other sources freely available on the internet. Most of it, by its very nature is rather generic but there are useful lessons to be learned regarding the added value of effective partnership working, helping to ensure that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Partnership can be defined as follows: ‘the partners aim to achieve something they could not do alone, by pooling skills and other resources. To do this they need a shared vision of their goals, and a way of working together which realises this ambition. This may involve a long-term formal structure, or a shorter-term agreement.’ In practice being a partner may be broken down into four sections which together comprise the whole role:

> To take part in (involvement)
> To be a part of (choice)
> To side with (commitment)
> To impart (communication)

The partnership of the (F)LAG brings together from all three sectors, public, private and civic and voluntary, a full range of sensitivities, points of view and interests. It also draws together resources for harnessing support, the capacity to engage and know-how. The listening and dialogue that takes place in the (F)LAG gives rise to:

> A broader view of the area, bringing unexpected opportunities;
> A new association of ideas, creating the seeds of innovation;
> More mature projects, fostering social cohesion;
> More effective implementation, with better risk management; and
> More sustainable actions, based on the capacity for renewal.

All these definitions highlight common elements of how partnerships work and how they seek to achieve something they could not do alone. Partners choose to participate and to commit. As the Start Up guide highlights the FLAG partnership:

> Brings together – on an equal footing – entities from the public, private and civic society sectors;
> Ensures that they work together to identify and pursue the achievement of common goals;
> Is long-term, i.e. goes beyond a single project or short-term cooperation;
> Involves the sharing of risks and benefits between all the partners; and
> Recognises that in working together, building on and complementing each other’s strengths and assets, the partners are stronger.

All these points make it clear that a local partnership cannot simply be seen as another local layer of administration for the decentralised delivery of central or regional measures. Experience shows that if they are mistakenly looked at it this way much of the added value mentioned above can be lost and the costs and bureaucracy involved in the extra layer can outweigh the benefits.

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2. Organising Local Partnerships; Innovation in Rural Areas Notebook 2 Leader European Observatory
1.3 The FLAG partnership

EFF Axis 4 partnerships are normally referred to as a Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG). A FLAG is not just a partnership; it is a very specific type of partnership with specific requirements and responsibilities.

Under EFF Axis 4 there is a requirement that in a given area the available support be implemented by an entity or group (local partnership or FLAG). It further requires that this partnership be balanced and represents a broad range of different sectors of the community including those from the fisheries sector, the public and private sector and representatives of the wider community. It requires that the partnership develops and delivers an integrated local development strategy prepared on a bottom up basis and that the partnership should possess sufficient critical mass of human, financial and economic resources to support that strategy. The partnership must have adequate administrative and financial capacity to administer the assistance and ensure the operations are completed successfully.

Partnership involvement starts at the very beginning of the process, without this there is no FLAG and without the FLAG no strategy or means of implementing it. The first two objectives of the FLAG therefore go hand in hand:

> The development of the area based strategy; and
> Identifying who is to be represented on the FLAG.

These elements are more comprehensively addressed in the Farnet Guide however the following points are worth noting in particular.

Getting the link between these elements right from the start is important. Practitioner experience suggests that it is very important for the partnership to get the strategy right at the outset. In order to do so it is essential to take time to identify the right stakeholders for your FLAG and then to fully involve these stakeholders in establishing the issues and priorities that will be the basis of your local strategy. The strategic work of the FLAG continues throughout the delivery of the strategy monitoring its relevance and performance and making adjustments to priorities and resources as appropriate.

Which bodies and organisations are represented on the FLAG will vary from area to area; this is one of the strengths of the Axis 4 partnership model in that it allows FLAGs to adapt to specific local conditions. Some guidance is available from the EU for bodies to be represented i.e. professional fisheries bodies, public, private, community, young, old, women and employed. This guidance is to help achieve the aim of a balanced partnership. The key point is that the partnership be balanced and representative of the area, it should include the key sectors, interests and stakeholders in the area and its functionality, i.e. how it works should reflect the balance. Farnet guide 1 provides guidance on how to map these stakeholders in setting up the partnership, this balance should be regularly monitored; partnerships are dynamic and subject to change. It is important to remember that it is the body or organisation that is represented on the FLAG; the people involved may well change.

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5 Council regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 Article 45.
1.4 How does the FLAG Partnership work?

The involvement of partners in the FLAG

The FLAG is comprised of Members who represent various local interests but also involves the Staff who are responsible for carrying out the management and administration of the programme and the Lead Partner or Accountable Body which has over all financial responsibility for the programme.

The Accountable Body

The lead partner or accountable body role varies considerably between member states and FLAGs and depends on the locally applicable institutional structure and the way in which the FLAG is constituted.

In some Member States the FLAGs are required to have a separate legal entity (e.g. an association or a non-profit company), in others this role is undertaken by a local authority or another public development body which possesses the necessary skills and capacities. In many cases this organisation is a FLAG partner. This dual role as a partner and the accountable body can be challenging both for the organisation concerned and for the FLAG. It is important to ensure that the two roles remain sufficiently separate and distinct and that undue responsibilities or influence are neither placed on nor assumed by the accountable body. Ensuring that the principles of the balance of FLAG membership are adhered to and respected at the decision making level is essential and helps to avoid difficulties here.

Whatever the structure, the accountable body is responsible for ensuring the effective administrative and financial management of the FLAG and the delivery of the local programme. They may also be responsible for the employment and line management of the staff team on behalf of the FLAG.

FLAG Members

In local partnership working the role of the individual FLAG members is seen to be very important and provides vital contacts with community groups and individuals raising their awareness of the programme, the local strategy and the potential for the development of projects. A wide variety of backgrounds, experience and local knowledge are necessary within the FLAG and are vital to sound and informed decision making when selecting projects to be funded. FLAGs will also benefit from motivated FLAG members who are able to ‘spread the word’ about the work of the FLAG and who can provide good networking channels and opportunities.

Commonly the FLAG members are there to represent their organisation or interest group. There are dangers however to the credibility and effectiveness of the FLAG if such representativeness is narrowly interpreted in terms of the interests of the individual stakeholders rather than the collective or corporate interests of the FLAG and territory. Partners who are solely interested in pursuing their own projects are unlikely to contribute effectively, can demotivate or block the involvement of others and may present challenges in managing conflicts of interest.

FLAGs are decision making organisations and those involved must be empowered to do so. It is therefore a great advantage to the FLAG if the members who attend meetings are sufficiently senior within their organisation to hold influence and speak with delegated authority on its behalf.

Those involved in the FLAG will be motivated in different ways, some will be there because it is their job, some because they represent a group in the community, others may represent business or other sectoral interests, because they want to make a difference or have a sense of civic responsibility or pride, some will be interested in securing project funding.
In managing the work of the FLAG and the involvement of members it is essential to take account of the basis on which people are involved if their motivation and contribution are to be maintained. In particular the difficulties and challenges faced by those from outwith the public sector i.e. those who are not being paid to be involved. These challenges need to be given due consideration for example in the location and timing of meetings, their workload, the costs of involvement etc. This is essential if the balance and representativeness of the FLAG is to be reflected in practice.

There are therefore a wide range of factors affecting the sustained involvement of voluntary FLAG members such as time requirements, dominance of public sector interests, lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities, lack of knowledge, conflicts of interest etc.

**FLAG Staff**

One of the key characteristics of Axis 4 delivery is the ability of FLAG staff to work on the ground to animate involvement and help build projects from the bottom up. The staff also needs to support the work of the FLAG and ensure that the programme is administered efficiently. Key functions that a staff team would be expected to cover include:

> Liaison and communication with local communities, strategic partners and the Managing Authority;
> Promotion and publicity relating to the programme;
> Responding to general and specific enquiries and servicing the project application process;
> Providing advice and guidance to project promoters including e.g. delivery of briefings or training on eligibility criteria and preparing applications;
> Project application technical and eligibility appraisals including the additionality, value for money, realism and deliverability of all project proposals;
> Issuing of letters of offer of grant as instructed by the FLAG;
> Management of any delegated authority schemes;
> Checking and processing projects claims and raising payments;
> Maintaining programme physical and financial management records and project files and associated reporting to the FLAG and Managing Authority;
> Project monitoring and the collation of data for the evaluation of the programme and projects;
> Cooperation and networking with other FLAGs and areas; and
> Providing administrative and secretarial support to the FLAG.

The relative balance between these elements will vary depending on the model of FLAG employed in the member state or region, for example the more centralised the approach adopted the less the financial and administrative functions the FLAG will have to undertake. Animation and project development support is an essential function in all cases.

Evaluation evidence from the three generations of LEADER makes it very clear that good quality staff are a key contributor to the success of area based development initiatives such as Axis 4. It therefore follows that recruiting, managing and developing the FLAG team is an important FLAG partnership role.

Where the FLAG has a small budget the total staff resource may be a single post or even a part time role, where the budget is larger a team covering the different roles may be employed. In either case finding the right person to be the FLAG manager is critical.

Where a single individual is employed they will need to be able to undertake an effective animation role and to ensure effective programme administration; not an easy combination of skills to find. If it is possible to recruit additional staff to carry out the more administrative functions this allows the manager to focus on animation and capacity development, both essential
in the early stages of FLAG development. Where such a team can be employed the manager will however need to possess or develop team management skills.

When recruiting for the FLAG manager some of the following attributes will prove invaluable: enthusiasm, energy, commitment, flexibility, pro-active and with good organisational skills. An ideal candidate will also possess strategic vision, good communication and networking skills, project development and business skills and a knowledge of the local area and/or fisheries sector to add credibility to the role.

How the FLAG and staff team interact and the respective roles undertaken will depend very much on the scale of the available resource. Where the staff team is small FLAG members and the manager are likely to need to work very closely together. The FLAG will therefore need to think about how they support their staff team; this may include training, mentoring or basing them in an organisation where there is some peer support.

1.5 Managing involvement

Setting the ground rules

In the early stages of the partnership’s work it is essential to establish the ground rules for how it will operate, these will normally be set out in the operational or business plan. These processes are covered in greater detail in Chapter 4c of Farnet guide 1 and in the associated business plan example7.

The partnership dynamic and the way the FLAG works together can be affected by inconsistent attendance, insufficient meetings or dominance of a few members or sectors. This can be exacerbated if there is not a clear definition of roles within the FLAG. It may take time for cultural differences across industry sectors to co-exist. The complexity of dealing with new rules and regulations and the difficulties in dealing with bureaucracy may also cause challenges within the FLAG.

Outlining the parameters of the new relationship

It is very important to establish at the outset a common understanding amongst FLAG members of what the aims and objectives are, what the FLAG is there to do and how it is going to be done. It is also important that all members of the FLAG understand that they have an obligation to act in the best interests of the local programme. Informed and transparent participation in decision making reinforces local credibility for the FLAG and when the right people are involved this adds great value to the local programme.

It is quite possible, particularly in the early stages of the FLAG, that local factors associated with different geographies, local loyalties and cultural differences may present some barriers. This is more likely in areas where new links have been formed across administrative areas where members have to learn to look at the whole FLAG area rather than their very local interests. The ability to look at the big picture may also be challenging for some FLAG members; for others the challenge will be

to encourage the public sector to work on an equal basis with the community and private sector. Awareness of these factors and finding ways of addressing them will contribute to the effectiveness of the partnership’s work, the partnership section of Farnet guide 1 provides some guidance here.

**FLAG Capacity and capacity building**

When a new group comes together it is often necessary to initiate a process to start to build the group into a functioning team. External facilitation can be very beneficial in the team building process as it allows the FLAG members to gain greater insight into each other and identify what each Member can contribute to the group in a neutral way. This can encourage better working relationships which can develop into proactive project development through better understanding and the essential trust between the partners. This could be combined with a regular FLAG working meeting or can be undertaken as a separate activity.

However to develop capacity further it is important to involve all the stakeholders within the FLAG and one of the ways to do this is ensure good communication. This can be done through press releases, hosting your own web site, attending or running funding workshops or attending awareness raising events. Keeping an up to date contact list for stakeholders allows dissemination of written information such as newsletters or inviting them to community events.

It will take time to build up the shared knowledge and skills required for effective working as a FLAG partnership. Structured or formal training and team building are a worthwhile investment of time and money as they can help to build trust and respect within the FLAG team. This can cover topics such as information and knowledge about Axis 4 or local development, skills specific to the work of the FLAG e.g. project appraisal, local area knowledge or team working.

**Governance**

The FLAG has a strategic as well as administrative role and depending on the size of the FLAG decisions will need to be made as to how to manage the day to day running of the programme. One of the first issues to decide on is whether the whole FLAG will be involved in the project assessment process, or will this be delegated to a smaller, but still representative team? If a smaller group is decided upon care must be taken to ensure that decisions made are quorate i.e. that the balance of the overall partnership between the various sectors is reflected. The whole FLAG should meet at least bi-annually and may choose to focus more on strategic priorities.

The wider use of working groups is an important tool for FLAGs in managing the work of the partnership spreading the workload and providing opportunities for people to be involved. These groups can undertake a large part of the work of the FLAG and normally report back to the full FLAG on their activities. They can provide a means for making best use of partners’ specialist skills or of targeting the specific interests of members or strategic priorities for the FLAG. There are examples of thematic groups targeting innovation or the environment; groups may also be set up to monitor and update the strategy or to oversee particular aspects of the FLAG’s work such as publicity or community engagement.
A very important part of maintaining trust and ensuring effective partnership working is the way in which conflicts of interest are managed and ensuring that these are avoided. It is important to realise that the perception of a conflict of interests may be as damaging to the FLAG as an actual conflict of interest. Conflicts of interest may arise when an individual’s business, organisational, personal or family interest and or loyalties conflicts with the FLAG or Programme. This can relate to FLAG Members and FLAG staff. Such conflicts may create problems as they can inhibit free discussion; result in decisions or actions that are not in the interest of the Programme; risk the impression that the FLAG has acted inappropriately or result in a decision which is perceived to lack impartiality.

It is vital that FLAGs develop a specific detailed policy on ensuring the avoidance of conflicts of interest. Key principles to be considered in this policy are objectivity, transparency and accountability, above all else honesty is essential and there is a duty on members to declare any private interests and act in the interests of the FLAG rather than any personal, organisational or business interest.

The policy should specifically ask that any member with an interest in a project should declare it at the outset of a meeting and that they should not take any part in voting on that project. Any member who has been approached in an attempt to influence a decision should declare this. The Member should make clear what the link is between themselves and the applicant and this should be documented in the minutes of project selection meetings which can be published, for example, on the FLAGs website. Some FLAGs may choose to ask the interested party to leave the room for the whole period of the discussion of the project in question; others think that their knowledge makes a valuable contribution to the discussion.

Where, when and how often the FLAG meet has a direct impact on the members’ ability to participate and contribute to the work of the FLAG. One of the most common difficulties for FLAG members is the demand placed on their time, both to attend meetings and for preparatory work prior to the meetings. This can be particularly problematic for voluntary members where FLAG membership is not part of their daily job. Optimising members’ ability to contribute is therefore the key consideration.

This can be alleviated a little by advance planning of meetings and ensuring that papers for the meeting are distributed in a timely manner. The timing and location of meetings will also have an effect on the time required for meetings.

You will need to consider what the best option is for your FLAG, the key considerations include what suits your partners best, the transport provision and the geography of your area. Some FLAGs choose to hold meetings in central locations that have good public transport links; others choose to hold the meetings in more remote locations to help maintain the links to the territory. Some FLAGs may rotate the meeting venue so that the burden of travel is shared more evenly between the partners.

It is sometimes worth considering combining FLAG meetings with visits to projects which have been supported or potential projects as this helps FLAG members experience projects at a ground level and hear first-hand of any issues that may be arising.
When will the FLAG meet?

Experience suggests that producing a calendar of FLAG meetings well in advance helps to ensure good attendance at meetings as it is often difficult to arrange meetings at short notice for a large number of busy people. Consideration should be given to the time of the meetings to ensure that they are convenient for as many FLAG members as possible. Some volunteer and business members may find it easier to attend evening meetings for example. Particular attention should be paid to any seasonal variations in work patterns and in particular those that will affect those from the fisheries sector specifically.

There may be facilities which help make participation easier e.g. a kids club or the ability to provide food. To help in the process of team building meetings in the morning followed by lunch may provide an opportunity for FLAG members to meet informally, get to know one another better and build relationships.

How often will FLAG meetings be held?

The FLAG needs to decide how often it wants to meet and how often it will assess projects, there may be different cycles of meetings for the full FLAG and any decision making groups. This will differ from FLAG to FLAG and will depend on the decision making process implemented. For project assessment purposes experience suggests that between four and five meetings a year are necessary, depending on the number of projects coming forward for assessment. If the FLAG is using working groups they may also meet more frequently and this may reduce the necessary frequency of full FLAG meetings.

Conducting the meeting

Remember to ensure that the FLAG members’ involvement is rewarding, make sure the meetings are interesting, that they make things happen and that they are fun. This can be encouraged by using Power Point presentations, providing statistical data in an easy to read format with graphs and charts to convey the key information and through the use of interactive approaches to ensure participation and inclusion. Materials for the meeting are normally prepared by the FLAG staff. Local partnership working may be new to the FLAG area and will have broadened the number of organisations who have decision making roles and responsibility, for example to voluntary and community organisations. Finding effective ways of helping them contribute to the process can lead to enhanced motivation and ownership within the community.
1.6 Making the programme work

It will take the whole partnership team to make the FLAG work well and the day-to-day procedures are the skeleton around which the body of project development work is constructed. Below are some key points to consider which cover the whole process of administering project development.

FLAG needs to be strategic as well as perform administrative tasks

Underpinning the work of strategy development and delivery is the vital administrative function the FLAG will fulfil. It is of the utmost importance to have a clear and robust administrative and financial framework in place at an early stage in the FLAG development. It is easier to make the effort to get this right at the outset than to have to make changes in retrospect. The Farnet guidance on business planning provides some suggestions here.

One simple approach to avoid increasing the work load is to make use of existing materials, all FLAGs have to perform these functions and there is ample opportunity to learn from others. FLAG partners may have their own materials or systems which can be relatively easily adapted or adopted. Templates of documentation that other FLAGs or LEADER LAGs have used in the past may also be available. These materials are likely to need to be adapted to fit your own specific FLAG, but they will provide an idea of what information is necessary to be captured and may also provide an insight into what additional information your FLAG may find useful.

Project animation

Project animation is an essential element of the work of Axis 4 in contributing to the initiation and development of successful projects helping to deliver the FLAG strategy. Animation has been proven to be a key differentiating element and very successful aspect of LEADER and will be of high value in introducing this type of development in areas which are new to the whole approach (project animation is addressed in more detail in the guide to Project Development and Selection).

Project animation is normally undertaken by the FLAG manager and staff, however involvement of FLAG members (or their organisations) who have specialist knowledge in the applicant’s field will provide added value. Awareness raising and publicity are an integral part of animation. This is an excellent opportunity for FLAG staff to broaden the range of people involved in project activity and the work of the FLAG. Awareness should be raised throughout the community, not just the easy targets or ‘usual suspects’. Having said this not all projects that approach the FLAG for funding are going to be appropriate for funding though EFF Axis 4. FLAG staff and members should be aware of other relevant funding streams in the area and be able to point applicants in the right direction for more appropriate support.

Funds, schemes, umbrella projects

Experience gained under LEADER suggests that the use of separate funds, schemes or ‘umbrella projects’ represent a potentially a useful mechanism for FLAGs to target support at priority themes or areas that have been identified in the FLAG strategy and business plan. These are also particularly useful ways of managing large numbers of small scale applications efficiently. Here a project promoter makes an application to the FLAG to establish a small grants scheme which targets a particular priority. The project (scheme) is approved in line with all the standard criteria and conditions of the FLAG including the methods and procedures which will be applied to applications under the scheme. The scheme is then operated on the basis of delegated authority within this approval, the project (scheme) holder is accountable to the FLAG for ensuring diligence in the application of the conditions and criteria.

At the time of writing the eligibility of this type approach has not been formally approved by the EC, this will be subject to the development of an FAQ which will be posted on the FARNET website.

Application and decision making processes

This section should be read in conjunction with the accompanying chapter on Active Project Development and Selection which covers much of this in more detail. Here we are mainly concerned with the role of the FLAG partnership and staff, who does what and how does it fit in the process?

Applications

In a two stage process each applicant will be asked to complete an initial enquiry form which will be assessed for technical eligibility and compatibility with the FLAG strategy. This would normally be undertaken by the FLAG staff. If the project is successful at this stage the applicant should then be asked to complete a full application form with help and guidance from the FLAG staff supporting them through the process if required.

Completed applications are considered by the FLAG members at regular meetings. As discussed before FLAG meetings should be scheduled well in advance to ensure high levels of attendance. It is also important that the FLAG staff prepare and provide FLAG members with the relevant papers for the meeting well in advance to allow them to prepare effectively, two weeks in advance would be ideal. It will be for each FLAG to decide what papers are appropriate to circulate but this would normally include, at a minimum, information on each project application being assessed and a summary of the financial and physical progress of the FLAG since the last meeting.

Technical assessment

All projects will need to be technically assessed for Axis 4 and Member State eligibility criteria. This is normally done by a member of the FLAG staff and is likely to involve close liaison with the accountable body. This assessment should be made available to those involved in project selection.

Project assessment

All project assessment by the FLAG should be undertaken in a systematic manner and clearly documented; this ensures consistency and transparent decision making. Assessment is not a precise art and there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. Different FLAG members may have very different opinions on projects and this is where the shared knowledge and experience of individual FLAG members is very important. It is from the differences of opinion that full and open discussions can take place during FLAG meetings.

Applying selection criteria

As a tool to aid the decision making process the FLAG may want to ‘score’ each project against a pre-determined set of criteria, regardless of the decision making approach adopted these criteria are essential. In addition to core criteria set at Member State or regional level each FLAG should decide upon their own criteria in line with their strategy and by using the same criteria for each application ensure the objectivity of the process (NB a FLAG may choose to adjust these criteria or their weighting in the light of experience or to reflect changes in the strategy or priorities). Scores should be used as a ‘guide’ and will often highlight variations in opinion between FLAG members. Ideally they should be used as a basis for discussion during the meeting rather than setting thresholds below which projects are rejected.

The application must be assessed from a strategic point of view: does it fit with the FLAG strategy, is it consistent with the business plan and does it target any of the FLAG’s identified priority groups?

If the FLAG are not able to come to a unanimous decision about a project then it may be necessary to vote on whether a project is funded or not.

It is of the utmost importance to ensure that all such decisions are properly recorded and that all the ground rules have been met e.g. the proportions of public and community/private sector representatives, the conflict of interest procedures etc. Consideration should therefore be given to how these decisions are recorded, one option is for each FLAG member to record their appraisal electronically and these can then all be held on file.
Audit control

Specifying and maintaining clear audit trail for the FLAGs decision making is very important. The easiest way to ensure the transparency of decision making is to document each step throughout the process. This can be done by noting all correspondence with an applicant both verbal and written in the project file. Detailed minutes of decisions should be taken, particularly the reasons for rejection of any application. If a project applicant is unhappy with a decision not to fund a project and where the local or national rules permit they may challenge or seek to appeal the decision. It will then be necessary to be able to explain to them how the decision was reached and provide the reasons justifying their project being unsuccessful.

It is important for the integrity of the process that there is a clear separation of duties within the FLAG staff. Those involved in project development and appraisal should not be approving claims and paying out grants. The audit trail on administration procedures should be clearly set out and transparently applied with each step documented, there should be no gaps or omissions. For example if a form is not completed then there should be a written explanation provided for this.

1.7 Claims for payment, reports and monitoring

After the projects have been approved and their activity has started claims for payments will start to come in and supporting reports on physical and financial progress will become required. The main involvement of the FLAG partners here will be in considering the reports which are generated and using these to help manage their programme better using the management information collected. All FLAGs are likely to be required to produce an annual report for their programme and partners would be expected to review and approve this for submission to the Managing Authority.

Partner involvement in claims will be limited as this is mainly the responsibility of the FLAG staff and the accountable body. There are two main approaches commonly adopted for this, either claims are submitted to and processed by the FLAGs and locally accountable body then forwarded to the payment agency or claims are submitted to the payment agency (in some countries they may be referred to the FLAG or accountable body for verification). Payments may then be made either by the paying agency directly or through the FLAG. In either case project promoters will require clear guidance and support with the claims process, particularly in the early stages of their project to avoid wasted effort, this can be a very time consuming process. Most of this support would normally be provided by the FLAG staff.

The fundamental requirements underpinning all claims are the elements of supporting evidence of process (e.g. any tendering etc.) and expenditure and a robust audit trail. It is important that project promoters know what information they are required to collect, what they will be required to pass on and what form this should be in. This may for example include original invoices, bank statements and proof of payment. No cash payments are allowed.
Projects will also be required to provide information on how they are progressing in the achievement of their targets, their outputs and results. This reporting of physical performance will involve the use of performance indicators; these will vary between member states and FLAGs. Some of these may require to be bench marked at the outset of the project so that changes can be measured. Here partner involvement may be more significant, it is common for FLAG members to be involved in the monitoring of projects’ performance, supporting the work of the staff team.

In addition to the contribution to progress monitoring this provides a useful mechanism for engaging the partners directly in the work of the FLAG and with the beneficiaries. This feeds in to the FLAGs monitoring of the effectiveness and on-going relevance of the territorial strategy and informs any adjustments which are required. Once again getting these systems and the associated guidance right at the start will be a great help particularly when it comes to the external evaluation of the EFF programmes.

1.8 Conclusion

A strong and effective partnership is fundamental to the local development approach and provides a very substantial component of the added value of the approach. This will not happen of its own accord. Effective partnership needs cultivation and maintenance through hard work, careful management and constant monitoring. Each partnership is different and will have its own characteristics and needs; the guidance in this note is designed to provide some core principles drawing on past experience which should help you develop your own local approach.