

FLAG ACTIVITIES

FLAG activities are fundamental to involving the local community in developing and implementing an effective local development strategy which enjoys strong ownership and is successful in mobilising local resources for projects that address identified weaknesses and opportunities of the local area. In September 2014, 40 FLAG representatives from France, Spain and Portugal discussed the different aspects of their work related to promoting and supporting effective local development. Discussions revealed different arrangements and a range of possible actions for animating FLAG territories and supporting the development, selection and promotion of effective projects, depending on working culture, size of territory and population covered, as well as resources available¹. The following “fiches” offer a check list of tips of five key areas of FLAG work resulting from these discussions:

- Animation
- Support to project development
- Project selection
- Monitoring and adapting FLAG work
- Effective communication

Evaluation is another important consideration for FLAGs but which was not dealt with at this event, given the lack time of to address it appropriately. However, it was touched on briefly through working groups on intervention logic, including a brainstorming on possible indicators.

Administration also tends to be a large component of FLAG work but, again, beyond the scope of this working event, especially given that administrative procedures are usually determined largely by the Managing Authority rather than by the FLAGs themselves. It is extremely important to understand, however, that the larger the administrative burden created by management procedures, the less time FLAGs have to dedicate to the value-adding tasks, such as animation, project development support and communication. For this reason, administrative procedures should be designed with utmost care to ensure that they are simple, robust and do not place unnecessary demands on FLAG staff.

¹ The [FLAG “dreamteam”](#) developed at this 2014 event recommends the equivalent of 3 full-time employs (FTEs) to manage all FLAG activities

Animation

Community “animation” is at the heart of the bottom-up approach to local development and involves **direct outreach to individuals in the community to generate and support new ideas to become concrete projects that benefit the local community**. For the 2014-2020 programming period, the importance of animation has been made more explicit in the Common Provisions Regulation² by allowing up to 25 % of the costs incurred within the implementation of the strategy to be spent on *running costs and animation*.³

Effective animation accounts for much of **the added value of bottom-up, local development** and is part of what differentiates it from top-down development policies. It can help encourage new ideas and adaptations to persistent challenges or changes in the local economy or environment. And, it can ensure local actors are involved in building and realising a **common vision** for the area, fostering a sense of collectiveness and shared objectives. Time spent on animation can help build community ties, cooperation between different sectors, as well as better integrating water and land based activities. In particular, it can help **mobilise hard-to-reach groups**, such as the fishing families, by building long-term trust, credibility and joint ownership of the FLAG’s objectives.

However, enough time⁴ must be dedicated to ensure animation delivers its full added value. It must, therefore, be properly resourced, targeted, strategic and ongoing. Below, we list a range of different animation activities that FLAGs proposed to reach different sections of their communities and mobilise potential project promoters. For further information, see also FARNET guides #1, [A Start-up Guide for FLAGs](#), and #4, [Steps for Success](#).

- **Awareness-raising and information** – *everyone should know the FLAG and what it supports*
 - ✓ Meetings with different local actors – fisheries sector, local municipalities, experts, associations, FLAG members...
 - ✓ Broader dissemination of information in the media – radio, TV, internet, social media...
 - ✓ Distribution of flyers, posters and other promotional material

- **Building local ownership** – *a community strategy*
 - ✓ Participative strategy development through group meetings and face-to-face visits
 - ✓ Ensuring balanced decision-making power in the FLAG, including sufficient influence for the fisheries sector
 - ✓ Bringing different stakeholders together around thematic areas of work (working group meetings e.g. on fisheries tourism)
 - ✓ Regular communication and promotion of the strategy (*see fiche on communication, p10*)

² Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013, see Article 35, 2.

³ Previously, an allocation of up to 10% of the FLAG budget was allowed for “running costs”, with no explicit mention of animation.

⁴ The [FLAG “dreamteam”](#) developed at this 2014 event recommends 0.5 FTEs dedicated purely to animation and mobilisation

- **Mobilising community members – encouraging local action**
 - ✓ Identify and mobilise “leaders” in the fisheries sector and other strategic sectors
 - ✓ Direct/individual door to door visits, including in the ports and at convenient times for fishermen
 - ✓ Guidance regarding eligible actions and focus of the FLAG strategy
 - ✓ Use of successful projects examples as inspiration
 - ✓ Boarding local fishing boats to gain experience and build credibility within the fisheries sector
 - ✓ Organise study visits to demonstrate and encourage specific activities
- **Maintaining support – turning ideas into action**
 - ✓ Regular presence at the local fishing ports, e.g. on a set day of the week
 - ✓ Organisation of training where necessary
 - ✓ Hands on support to develop ideas into projects (*see fiche on project development support, p4*)
 - ✓ Keep FLAG members involved and up-to-date of new developments and emerging ideas
- **Local and national networking – tapping into contacts and support structures**
 - ✓ Attending events of other local organisations
 - ✓ Participation and exchange within national network



Project development support

Once a FLAG has helped generate project ideas in the community and motivated community members to embark upon specific projects, **close support to realise these projects** can be vital, especially for harder-to-reach sections of the community which may lack the skills, experience and financial resources to implement new activities. Even for the most dynamic and capable community members, the administrative burden and complexity that can accompany public grants is often a major barrier to local innovation. **Tailored support** from the FLAG can ease this burden, while helping to encourage an **integrated set of local projects**, which are connected and complementary to each other and which can benefit from mutual learning and promotion. Here are some suggestions of how to provide such support:

- **Developing project ideas – from ideas to projects**

- ✓ One-to-one meetings with potential project promoters to help clarify and develop their project ideas: questions, suggestions, explanation of selection criteria...
- ✓ Support to ensure projects are adapted to fit and contribute to the FLAG strategy, while ensuring maximum impacts... (direct towards other funds if more relevant)
- ✓ Mediation between fisheries and other sector actors to develop collective projects
- ✓ Training days for project promoters to develop their projects
- ✓ Presenting the project opportunity to the board for initial feedback
- ✓ Facilitating exchange of ideas by putting potential project promoters in contact with similar projects carried out

- **Technical expertise and support – preparing the project**

- ✓ Administrative support with the funding application
- ✓ Support and information on obtaining necessary licenses (contacts, information...)
- ✓ Awareness-raising regarding relevant regulations that must be complied with (health & safety, environmental...)
- ✓ 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...)
- ✓ On-site project checks prior to project launch

- **Monitoring and capitalisation – *ensuring maximum impact***

- ✓ Ongoing monitoring, project visits and exchanges throughout project life-cycle, including a focus on results and areas of improvement
- ✓ Support for adaptations where needed (financial plan, calendar, additional expertise...)
- ✓ Fostering a network for local project promoters, allowing them to benefit from experience and contacts of other local development actors
- ✓ Support for publicity and promotion of local projects (see fiche on communication, p10)



See FARNET Guide #4, [Steps for Success](#) for further information on supporting project development

Project selection

A transparent and effective project selection process is fundamental to justifying the FLAG's legitimacy to support specific local actions over others as well as 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. On top of these basic fundamentals, FLAGs have an important role to play in selecting **projects which are sustainable and bring benefits to the community** in those areas identified as priorities in its strategy. Of course, if FLAGs are to have a choice of projects from which to select, the upstream work of animation to encourage and **develop a critical mass of relevant project ideas** is vital. At the same time, it is important not to forget that project selection is not simply a matter of scoring projects and supporting all those for which the budget allows, in order of their score ranking; **projects should be evaluated and selected against an agreed quality standard** which should be achieved by every project in order to secure FLAG funding. The following actions are some of the basics to select relevant and quality projects:

- **Preparing the selection criteria – from strategy to concrete projects**
 - ✓ Establish clear objectives for the sort of projects desired (based on the FLAG strategy)
 - ✓ Set selection criteria that will see the most relevant and valuable projects selected. This may include specific weighting depending on objectives, e.g. additional points for:
 - Projects presented by or involving fishermen
 - Projects presented by women
 - Projects presented by young people
 - Collective projects (i.e. involving two or more different partners or sectors)
 - Expected impacts for the territory
 - Jobs expected to be created by the project
 - Projects with innovative elements and/or links to research
 - ✓ Set quality standard for project selection, including, for example:
 - Viability
 - Project promoter capacity
 - Number of overall points needed to receive support
 - Etc.

See FARNET Guide #4, [Steps for Success](#) for further information on active project selection

Preparing the calls – ensuring uptake, managing proposals

- ✓ Open calls Vs closed calls (Open calls, i.e. that are open for the whole programming period, help avoid excessive accumulation of work load around the submission deadlines, allowing a smaller number of projects to be evaluated when there is sufficient critical mass and the avoidance of large delays in giving candidates a decision. Closed calls, i.e. open for a short period with a specific submission deadline, tend to allow the comparison of a larger number of projects, sometimes making the process more competitive)
- ✓ General calls Vs thematic calls (some FLAGs issue calls for projects related to all thematic priorities of the local group, while others prefer to focus on one specific priority at a time, e.g. direct sales, or fisheries related tourism. The former can afford more flexibility while the latter can help focus energy and expertise on specific themes, mobilising a stronger critical mass of stakeholders)
- ✓ Broad dissemination of the calls at local and regional level: in official publications and websites, via social media, promotional material distributed throughout the territory etc.

Selecting local projects – ensuring transparency and quality projects

- ✓ Technical evaluation of projects, including technical, economic and financial viability
- ✓ Scoring of the projects against the selection criteria and quality standard
- ✓ Interview with candidates: the capacity and drive of a project promoter was considered key to the success of a given project
- ✓ Selection committee made up of board members and possibly relevant experts to debate the different proposals, to review them against the objectives of the strategy and make a final decision on which candidate projects the FLAG should support



Monitoring and Adaptation of FLAG strategy and work

Once a FLAG starts to approve projects and implementation begins, there is important follow-up to carry out on a regular basis in order to **monitor that funds are indeed going to the priorities established in the FLAG strategy, that delivery mechanisms are efficient and that projects are having the results expected**. While it can be tempting to leave such monitoring to later in the programme, if FLAG actions are to be adapted as necessary, it is important to **build such activities into the routine work of the FLAG from an early stage**. Moreover, a **system to collect clear information on results of FLAG funded projects** is invaluable for justifying investments and communicating the benefits that the programme is delivering to the local community, and must also be built in from the beginning. It will also facilitate evaluation of FLAG work, a key tool for learning and improvement and for which arrangements are compulsory in the 2014-2020⁵ period. In some cases, monitoring and evaluation (including regular strategy review) may point to a need to change course, in which case the FLAG might need to explore certain amendments to its strategy. In any case, some important actions can be found below:

- **Monitoring implementation – sticking to the strategy**
 - ✓ Clear plan of strategic objectives
 - ✓ Clear plan of spending expectations by strategic priority
 - ✓ Regular analysis of budget spent on the different strategic priorities
 - ✓ Overview of all projects approved at each board and general assembly meeting, including budget programmed by strategic priority
 - ✓ Monitoring of delivery process (administrative procedures, resources needed, time needed for different steps, e.g. project approval, payment to beneficiaries...)
 - ✓ Annual reports on the state of implementation – against each strategic priority

- **Monitoring results – what progress against targets?**
 - ✓ Establishing indicators, including collection method, frequency and sources (e.g. applicant form, questionnaires, statistics database)
 - ✓ Identification of relevant context indicators for which a change may be expected when implementing the FLAG strategy (e.g. socio-economics of local fisheries, marine environmental indicators and other data relevant to the FLAG strategy)
 - ✓ Project fiches against which the FLAG can check if strategic priorities are being met
 - ✓ Use meetings with project holders to collect data on project results to avoid creating an additional burden
 - ✓ On the ground visits to see projects in action
 - ✓ Ongoing monitoring and advice to ensure each project fulfils the commitments to the FLAG strategy for which it was selected
 - ✓ Questionnaires to project promoters and other local stakeholders on project results, community satisfaction...

⁵ Common Provisions Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013, Article 33 (f)

- **Analysing results – what is working? What needs to improve?**
 - ✓ Technical analysis of information collected from the projects
 - ✓ Periodic meetings to analyse developments in the territory against the context indicators, illustrating the position and trends of key issues the strategy aims to address.
 - ✓ Proactive monitoring of the ongoing relevance and appropriateness of the strategy in order to identify potential need to review the strategy or targets, and reallocate budgets
 - ✓ Statistical reports of project results - jobs created, revenue generated, new markets accessed...

- **Responding to analysis – additional focus on specific projects and/or strategic adaptation**
 - ✓ Thematic working groups on strategic priorities which have attracted few projects (in order to generate projects desired)
 - ✓ Targeted, one-to-one visits to potential project promoters
 - ✓ Involving “leaders” in the community who can mobilise relevant stakeholders
 - ✓ Identifying other FLAGs that have projects in that strategic area and organising study visits to learn from them
 - ✓ Additional calls for specific projects
 - ✓ Attendance at local events related to the thematic area to present the FLAG’s objectives and link up with potential promoters
 - ✓ Transferring budget to other strategic priorities in cases where potential for results is exhausted
 - ✓ Adapting the FLAG strategy in cases where emerging results or developments in the territory make this desirable



Communicating FLAG work and results

Ensuring effective and professional communication of FLAG work, and the benefits this brings to the territory, was widely acknowledged by the FLAGs to suffer from lack of time and resources. Indeed, it was reported to be given less priority compared to the procedures of fostering and selecting projects, along with basic administrative necessities. And yet communication is a vital element in the process of **involving the local population** in the FLAG's work, **promoting and supporting the activities carried out by local 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 project results) require a specific communication action and FLAGs need to study and plan communication activities carefully. This may involve the use of a professional communication company where FLAG staff lacks the time or expertise to do this effectively. **Communication should be ongoing and two-way** – informing primary stakeholders and the general public on a regular basis of FLAG opportunities and results; but also ensuring that feedback channels are used to gather information on how to improve FLAG work going forward.

- **Presence in the community** – *ongoing visibility of the FLAG and its objectives*
 - ✓ Distribution of posters, flyers and other promotional material
 - ✓ Attending local events – fishermen's gatherings, fairs, regional open days, educational events etc.
 - ✓ Individual visits to key stakeholders
 - ✓ Word of mouth

- **Communicating results** – *showcasing FLAG supported projects*
 - ✓ Regular newsletter, including descriptions of projects supported and budget programmed
 - ✓ Public exhibitions and events to showcase projects supported
 - ✓ Project videos, disseminated online and screened at events
 - ✓ Up-to-date website with information on FLAG work, project supported and upcoming calls
 - ✓ Project presentations and feedback by beneficiaries to FLAG members and local co-financers

- **Working with the local and specialised media – newspapers, magazines, radio, television**
 - ✓ Regular press releases on FLAG activities, projects supported and benefits brought to the community
 - ✓ Radio, TV and written interviews with FLAG members and project promoters
 - ✓ Coverage of the programme and FLAG's activities in specialised fisheries and aquaculture publications (local/regional/national)
- **Keeping two-way communication channels open – ensuring accessibility of the FLAG**
 - ✓ Easy accessibility to FLAG staff by telephone, email and at the FLAG office
 - ✓ Regular meetings and workshops with FLAG members to discuss results and plan future actions
 - ✓ Open Q&A sessions on new calls
 - ✓ Dedicated time and resources to animating social media

