

STRATEGIES

- **What is the meaning of critical mass?**

In the EFF Regulation the term “critical mass” is applied to the territory covered by the FLAG. This should “be coherent and have sufficient *critical mass* in terms of human, financial and economic resources to support a viable local development strategy” (A45.3).

In other words, critical mass refers basically to the relationship between the size of the area (in physical, population and economic terms) and the resources available to the FLAG through Axis 4 (both financial and human). The key test is that both the area and the resources available through Axis 4 have to be sufficient to support a viable local development strategy. There needs to be enough “critical mass” to realistically achieve what is proposed in the strategy.

If the area is too small, it is likely to be difficult to find the private resources, human capital and experience to implement the strategy. If, on the other hand, the area is too large, the impact of Axis 4 is likely to be insignificant in relation to the problems of the area.

- **Can the projects to be implemented in an area be pre-selected and presented as part of the local strategy in the FLAG application?**

In general, no. The individual operations or actions financed by Axis 4 should be selected by the FLAG on the basis of open and transparent selection procedures and criteria. The inhabitants of local fisheries areas should have a fair opportunity to apply once the strategy has been approved. In the planning phase of the strategy, it is normal for examples and types of projects to be discussed but no individual projects should be pre-selected before the FLAG has been approved.

One exception to this general rule is where the FLAG proposes certain strategic collective projects within the overall strategy in pursuit of the objectives; these are in effect approved along with the strategy itself.

- **How can Member States assist the FLAGs in developing their strategies? What kind of capacity building is necessary?**

The preparation of strategies by the FLAGs and the processes involved in their development should be seen as one of the most important contributions made by Axis 4. Their real value lies not so much in the technicalities of the strategy but in the fact that they have been discussed and worked through in a bottom-up way with all the main stakeholders in an area from the very beginning.

¹ These answers have been prepared in response to questions raised by actors involved in the implementation of Axis 4 of the EFF. These guidelines do not replace the basic legal texts. Interpretations given here do not prejudice a possible decision of the Commission or a possible judgment of the Court of Justice which alone is competent to give legal opinions on the validity and the interpretation of acts adopted by Community institutions.

The strategies should be seen as far more than a formality for obtaining a limited amount of funding and rather as the foundation stones for a sustainable process of local development which extends beyond the programming period in both time and scope. In this sense, one of the most valuable investments that Axis 4 can make is in community training and building the capability to act.

Member States appear to be following two main types of capacity building processes. Those possessing a well developed network of experienced local development actors have often launched a one stage call for proposals for the areas, groups and strategies. Support for this existing capacity is provided through information meetings, campaigns, websites, explanatory manuals, training sessions and expert support at the local level. An example of this type of approach is [France](#).

Many countries with less experience of integrated local development strategies have preferred to organise a two stage selection process. This involves a list of potential areas and / or groups which are preselected on the basis of a relatively light call for expression of interest. These groups thus selected then benefit through the provision of a programme of training, mentoring and expert support to help set up the partnership and develop the strategy. An example of this kind of approach is [Estonia](#).

- **To what extent can the resources available for technical assistance be used to help in the implementation of Axis 4?**

Given the lack of experience of many of the actors involved in Axis 4 in integrated local territorial development, the use of national technical assistance (Axis 5) is not only desirable but, in fact, essential for success. The Commission strongly recommends that technical assistance for Axis 4 be deployed as rapidly as possible at national or regional levels. For example this may be used to directly provide expert support for capacity building, in effect constituting direct support for the development of partnership, community engagement and the area strategies.

In countries with a relatively large number of groups the TA should be used to provide resources for an Axis 4 Network of FLAGs which collaborates with the European FARNET Support Unit. This has been specified in the OPs and should be implemented rapidly.