

NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK

1. TITLE OF THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BODY

National rural network

2. LEGAL BASIS

Article 66(3) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698 /2005

1st indent: funding

2nd indent: specific national programmes

3rd indent: procedure for adopting implementing rules

Article 68:

Article 39 and Annex II of the Commission regulation (EC) n°...../2006

3. FUNDING THE NATIONAL NETWORK

The national network is funded by the technical assistance of rural development programmes; Member States with regional programmes may propose a specific programme to run the national network.

The following financial information on the national network should be given in the programme under the table on Indicative breakdown by Rural Development measure.

Measure/Axis	Public expenditure	Private expenditure	Total Cost
511. Technical Assistance - of which amount for the national rural network (where relevant): (a) running costs (b) action plan			

3.1. Specific national programmes

The specific programme and its financial table shall make a distinction between the structure needed to run the network and the action plan.

Expenditure related to the structure needed to run the network shall not exceed 25% of the total amount of that programme.

4. MINIMAL COMMUNITY REQUIREMENTS

4.1. Deadline for establishment

National rural networks shall be established by 31 December 2008 at the latest.

4.2. Objectives and duties

- to group the organisations and administrations involved in rural development
- There is a general duty to facilitate at Member State level an exchange of expertise and support implementation and evaluation of the rural development policy and to secure and coordinate the information flow between the local, national and European level.
- The action plan contains at least
 - transfer of knowledge (identification and analysis of good transferable practices and the provision of information about them, the organisation of exchanges of experience and know-how)
 - training (the preparation of training programmes for local action groups in the process of formation)
 - Technical assistance for inter territorial and trans-national cooperation.”

5. STRUCTURES NEEDED TO RUN THE NETWORK

The structure needed to run the network may be established either within the competent national authorities or by selection through tendering procedures.

That structure must be able to perform the tasks described in the action program.

The structure must have the sufficient staff with international skills to be the contact of the European Rural Network and other national networks and to provide the support to transnational cooperation.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of these recommendations presented below are conclusions of the 2006 Leader+ Observatory report: "Networking: The Leader experience"

6.1. Recommendation for the structure

Member States have the responsibility to adopt the necessary structure. The following bodies are recommended:

- a permanent secretariat to manage the network (National Network Unit);
- a coordinating committee grouping the main categories of rural actors (organisations representing the categories of beneficiaries of the programme or third parties concerned by the objectives of measures) and the administrations;
- thematic networks : they can be targeted enough to be of direct interest to actors and act as a strong incentive for their participation around common issues. At the beginning of the

programming period, thematic sub-networks could determine the global process and introduce in a progressive manner a way of working together. The thematic networks would then have to widen the range of issues being developed in order to avoid division and allow for a general exchange of information and experiences. Rural actors concerned by the programmes are according to the measures implemented:

Axis 1 and Axis 2: vocational training organisations for agriculture, food and forestry sectors; the farmers associations including young farmer organisations; producer groups associations and associations of cooperatives in agriculture and forestry including quality producer groups associations in agriculture; chambers of agriculture, network of advisory services for agriculture and forestry, forestry owner associations, food and forestry processing industry associations, land management agencies, energy and water supply organisations, mountain farming organisations, Natura 2000 network, environmental NGO, agri-environment technical and scientific institutes, animal welfare NGO.

Axis 3: Chambers of trade and industry in rural areas, rural tourism organisations, landscape and environmental protection organisations, cultural heritage organisations, vocational training organisations.

Axis 4: local action groups and their informal networks.

Administrations concerned are: Regional and national administrations involved in the implementation of the programmes, other administrations concerned by rural policies, national association of rural communes.

6.2. Recommendation for the human resources

Two options are possible for the establishment of the National Network Unit: It could be set up within the administration or outsourced totally or partially via one or several contracts (the more probable case in reality as normally administrations will not have animation capacity). Several tenders might be needed to implement all tasks mentioned in Article 68. In such cases a coordinating function by the national administration or left to the contractors to manage the network is needed.

Technical resources that are essential for a good functioning and efficiency of the networks include:

- Information technologies: a good system for internet site (multi-lingual) and databases;
- Contacts with wider rural development networks, research institutes, resource centres, political spheres, etc. to be able to develop a horizontal approach to the (rural development) network.
- good knowledge of European languages, cultures, contexts and history are put forward as being important since only they can lead to the creation of easy, professional and long-lasting network of people at the European level and be useful in the identification of potential partners needed by local actors or when bringing support to cross-border projects.
- Expertise should be available 'inside' the network and the networking unit as well as outside to complement the internal skills:

Expertise/ skills on all themes related to rural development are needed:

- for animation (of a network being both bottom-up and top-down)
- to communicate (inside the country but also outside)
- on editorial matters
- for marketing
- for public relations advice
- to organise events
- on cooperation,
- on evaluation
- for training
- on applicable action research, academic know-how which is based and rooted in practical expertise at ground level
- for counselling
- on administrative matters and procedures

Human qualities: the staff of the networking units ought to have an accessible approach, show enthusiasm for the network and the projects developed by the actors, be service orientated, have a strong team spirit etc. A good team Leader is essential.

Networking needs are continuously changing. The networking units ought to keep in mind this need for evolution, not only in terms of technical resources they use or develop, but also in terms of the available human resources.

6.3. Recommendation for the common networking tools

The European Rural network and the national rural networks should use common tools in the tasks related to identification of good practices and support to transnational cooperation. These tools should be included in the action plan from the beginning and will include:

- project database based on the use of a common pilot project form (elaboration of list good and best practices)
- transnational project database
- expert database
- Local action groups database based on the use of a common LAG form
- Transnational cooperation partnersearch tool

6.4. Recommendations for the action plan

Progress step by step:

There is the need for a flexible approach; Putting too much ambition on the rural development network from the beginning might lead to building a system too complex and difficult to implement. This might in turn lead to a failure or the implementation of a minimum set of activities with some participation but not real involvement by the actors.

Since people who are to be involved in the rural development network do not yet know how to work together, it seems preferable to start slowly, to have smaller groups meet around tangible issues on which people agree (for instance on thematic issues which concern them directly). This could progressively create a habit of working together and the desire to address more sensitive issues.)

Networking tools

In addition to the common tools (6.4) present in each national network and in the European network the following tools are proposed to be developed by the future rural development networking units:

- web site:
 - link between the networks active in the different Member States
 - communication from the European network
 - with different parts: parts with totally open access, parts for actors and others for professionals of the network
 - *web channels are important in various languages*
- publications
- events to get people to meet, linked to axes and themes,
- thematic working groups,
- assistance on transnational cooperation
 - proactive expertise
 - rules on the implementation of cooperation in the different Member States
 - cooperation starter kits (basic information, methodology, and list of available and free experts on the theme)
 - thematic meetings dedicated to cooperation (a sufficient budget allowing also the national networks to participate in European events and meetings in other Member States will be provided for)
 - mentoring schemes for direct contacts
- training tools for new LAGs
- support on the theme of evaluation
- production of technical information including information on rural development programmes funded by the EAFRD
- focus on implementation (tools, measures, methods) is most interesting for practitioners
- scientific committee aiming at the dissemination of knowledge and research on rural development

SPECIFIC PROGRAMME TEMPLATE

SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES FOR NATIONAL RURAL NETWORKS (REFERRED TO IN ARTICLE 39(3) AND (5))

Specific national programmes must include the following elements:

- (a) list of organisations and administrations involved in rural development which will form part of the national rural network;
- (b) procedure and timetable for establishing the national rural network,
- (c) summary description of the main categories of activity to be undertaken by the national rural network. These activities will form the basis of the action plan to be drawn up by the Managing Authority and supported under Article 68(2)(b) of Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005;
- (d) amount reserved for establishing and operating the national rural network and implementing for the action plan as referred to in Article 68(2)(a) and (b) of Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 and the annual breakdown of the EAFRD contribution which must be compatible with Article 69(1) of Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005;
- (e) a financial table for the whole programming period of the following format (EUR current prices):

Type of expenditure for the national rural network	Total public expenditure	EAFRD contribution
(a) for running the structure of the national rural network		
(b) for implementing the action plan of the national rural network, including its evaluation		
Total		

- (f) Designation of competent authorities and bodies responsible;
- (g) A description of the monitoring and evaluation system, as well as the envisaged composition of the Monitoring Committee.