EUROPE & SCOTLAND
European Regional Development Fund
Investing in a Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Future

EUROPE & SCOTLAND
European Social Fund
Investing in a Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Future

Lead Partner Event
28 & 30 August 2017
Evaluation

1. Purpose

The purpose of these events is to bring together representatives from lead partner organisations and the Managing Authority providing a networking opportunity to share best practices, knowledge and experiences and a forum to discuss delivery and encourage discussion.

2. Event Organisation

The first of these events was held in August over two days: one for the European Social Fund programme (ESF) and one for European Regional Development Fund programme (ERDF). Most of the content for the two days remained the same.

3. Location and agenda

The events were held centrally in Glasgow's Trades Hall, considered to be easily accessible with a reasonable start time of 10 am for lead partners having further to travel.

The event was opened by David Anderson, Head of European Structural and Investment Funds. This was followed by presentations on the review, claims and verifications, procurement, audit and communications. An opportunity for questions was provided after each presentation and at the end before closing the event.

4. Attendance figures

The events were well attended with representation from all lead partners with 44 participants attending the ESF event and 72 attending the ERDF event. A number of Managing Authority and Audit Authority staff also attended.

5. Main findings from the post event survey

40 responses were received and the findings are summarised below:
- The event was well received and events should continue on a regular basis.
- The event presented a good opportunity for networking and engaging with Managing Authority (MA) staff. Ample opportunity was given to ask questions.
- At times the noise from the building works and traffic impacted on the ability to hear the speakers. Speakers should have microphones.
- A Q&A should be circulated post event.
- There was an even split in LP views on holding the meetings quarterly or bi-annually.
- Future topics should include: Progress being made by SIs and activity within growth strands; Opportunity for synergy; Claims and key findings; MA Updates; EUMIS; Procurement; Brexit.
- Opportunity to raise and discuss common issues.
- Opportunity to hear from lead partners (delivery/good news stories/ issues arising).
- Workshops to concentrate and discuss key issues.

- Provide an opportunity to raise questions in advance of the meeting.
- Clear preference for more interaction during the events.
- Response to the toolkit varied. On the whole it is a useful tool to locate and increase awareness of the publicity requirements.
- The majority of lead partners are using social media. However responses suggest that more support is required.
- Any changes to guidance need to be clearly communicated and further clarity in some areas would be beneficial.
- Case studies and examples of good practice should be shared via the ESIF website and newsletters. These should be collected during on-site visits.

6. Actions

- Events will be run every four months. As we are entering a key phase, the MA feels that this will allow for regular updates and discussion. The events could then be held bi-annually. As the annual event was held the end of November the next event will be in February.
- Lead partners will have the opportunity to ask questions in advance and more interaction will be built into future events.
- Use the LP events to feedback any upcoming changes to processes or guidance. MA to provide feedback and discuss lessons learned.
- Microphones will be available at future events.
- Develop toolkit and seek avenues for increasing social media and hashtag use. One LP asked for further information on the types of posts which get the most attention. This will be looked into as part of the MA's social media and website analysis.
- Promote case studies and good practice via newsletters, the blog and the website. Look at the possibility of an ESIF website as SG website's structure can be restrictive.
- Circulate Q&A post event.
- Schedule events for 10:30 start with a shorter lunch and will not held on a Monday.
- Look at set up and opportunity for workshops and including LP presentations.

7. Questions and Answers – Summary of questions raised during and post event

PHASE 2

- **What is the end date for phase 2 operations?**
  - The end date for phase 2 is June 2023. All final claims must be submitted by the end of September 2023.

- **If increasing IR for phase 2 do need new operation**?
  - Yes

- **When do phase 2 operations have to be approved by?**
  - Grant offers must be signed and returned before March 2019. The intention is to have as many extensions and operations approved by June 2018 to allow time to review all priorities and provide an opportunity to address these in order to maximise commitment levels.

- **Extensions versus new operation submissions**

If there is no significant change to the activity and how the operation is being delivered, then LPs can ask extend via an enhanced request for change process. Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. LPs should contact the MA to discuss.

PROCUREMENT
- **Can there be a common form used by MA and AA**
  - Members of the MA Procurement Team have liaised with the AA to standardise forms/checklists, where possible. However, the AA is independent from the MA and will form their own view when they carry out their audits

- **Grant schemes and procurement -** do we check procurement at grant level?
  - The MA will not carry out procurement check at final recipient level. Lead Partner must follow MA Grant Scheme Guidance.

- **Can use report produced by PCS as tender evaluation report**
  - If this report contains information required as per Para 83 of Public Contracts Scotland Regulations 2015, then yes.

- **It would be useful to have an adapted checklist for contracts under the OJEU thresholds**
  - A new checklist is being developed to cover below threshold contracts. The current checklist is sufficient at the moment and should be used. A narrative should be added to explain the process.

PARTICIPANTS

PRE-NEET PARTICIPANTS
- Following discussion with the Commission, it has been agreed that Pre-NEET individuals can be included within Phase 1 Employability Pipeline operations. It is anticipated that these individuals will be recorded as 'Economically Inactive'. In addition, individuals must meet all other eligibility criteria (e.g. have multiple barriers to employment; demonstrate they have the right to 'Live and Work' etc.). Lead Partners should refer to the Participant Guidance for further detail.

- It should be noted that the main focus of the pipeline is to assist individuals with multiple barriers to employment (and who are the furthest away from the labour market) to progress into or through employment. Lead Partners can therefore work with individuals who are of 'minimum working age' or around 6 months prior to the individual reaching the 'minimum working age'

YEI participants must be aged 16–29 and reside in the West of Scotland region. Participants must be unemployed or inactive at the point of entry on YEI. Pre-neet participants are not eligible.

The participant guidance covers **Poverty and Social Inclusion.** If you are using a referral from an organisation then the information must be evidenced unless it is from a national register. Some adjustments are currently being made to include further detail on the household types for social inclusion and poverty.

FINANCE

- Can the MA guarantee that neither the AA or EC will carry out any verification or audit of the indirect costs
  - There will be no check on indirect costs.

- **Do irreversible payments still require a bank statement?**
  - **Yes.** Please note that following the event this was discussed by the Audit Authority who has confirmed that a bank statement is still required as evidence of defrayal.

Annex

Summary by Question:

Did you find the day informative? Please provide comments on the day itself e.g. location/ lunch/ timings/ presentations

- The venue and location was good and the day informative.
- Some speakers were difficult to hear due to building works in the next building and traffic.
- Some felt start time this could be changed to cater for people attending outside the central belt.   A time of 10:30 am was suggested and a day other than a Monday.
- Comments were made on how some presentations were basic and covered content already known.
- Not enough opportunity or interaction.
- An hour for lunch was too long and the day could have been fitted into a half day

Do you have any questions arising from the day?

Comments made:

- *"Any queries we had have been followed up with our Scottish Government contacts."*
- *"No but a note of the questions and answers from both sessions could be circulated."*
- *"No as there was plenty of opportunity to ask questions on the day."*
- *"No as people were on hand at the event to discuss any issues and the lunch time was useful for networking."*

Questions noted as part Q&A.

What would you like us to cover at future events and how often do you think they should be?

The following table shows recurring topics lead partners would like to see presented at future events.

Topic	Lead partner comments/ requirements
Updates	Updates on: - Government/ ESF updates; - future funding; - rules/systems - progress - any new developments.
Brexit	Impact of Brexit and any future funding arrangements
Claims	Key lessons/findings from claims which could help future submissions; Evidence; compliance and resolutions; claims

	process and milestones; reporting and compliance; issues lead partners finding with claims
Compliance	Reasons why certain evidence is required/not allowed; what is ok & what is not.
Issues	Common issues across programme; current issues at the time and pointers for the future; discussions workshop on key issues; further programme reviews.
Strategic Interventions	SI integration workshop; progress across all SIs in the Highland and Islands and actual spend; hear about what other Strategic Interventions are doing; opportunity for synergy; common challenges faced by LPs.
EUMIS	EUMIS overview; input feedback; a specific EUMIS event or workshop on EUMIS; lessons learned from this round of submissions; technical issues for uploading and transferring data.
Successes and sharing	Successes and what is working for people; sharing good practice; projects led by other lead partners.

How often should the events take place:

- Bi-monthly   -   2
- quarterly   -   11
- 6 monthly   -   10
- 3 per year   -   3
- No preference stated -   15

Additional points raised:
- Discussions/workshops on key issues
- Perhaps move around the country to share the burden and cost of traveling/hosting.
- Rather than a series of presentations to large audience, use smaller round table / work shop type format in which people have the opportunity to rotate around 3 or 4 Lead Partners

Would you like the opportunity to raise questions in advance of the event?

Out of 40 responses:

- Yes   -   97.5%
- No   -   2.5%

Please comment on the content of the toolkit and its usefulness as an aid in using social media. Is there anything you would like to see added?

Out of 32 responses:

- No   -   17
- Haven't used or unsure   -   8

- Other comments   -   7

Comments on the toolkit include:

- *It is useful, but quite basic. It would be good to see some further suggestions for increasing social media impact.*
- *I thought it was useful to have and will help ensure that Lead Partners are aware of the correct Publicity requirements and what can be used to publicise projects and activities.*
- *Ministerial twitter pages do not re-tweet on numerous occasions these have been sent to Ministers and SG accounts*
- *Useful to have the same strap line, would be good to agree format/template so we all have a uniformed approach*

Do you currently use social media? If so, do you use our hashtags?

Out of 32 responses:

Use neither social media nor hashtags -   15
Use both social media and hashtags   -   10
Use social media but not hashtags   -   7

Will the toolkit help you in any of the following?

☐   Use of social media - 62%

☐   Use of hashtags   - 62%

☐   Location and awareness of publicity requirements – 88%

Is the current guidance or publicity requirements adequate? If no, what further do you require?

31 responses:

Yes, guidance and publicity requirements are adequate   -   23
Yes, guidance and publicity requirements are adequate however… -   3
No, with reason   -   5

Feedback includes:

- *Participant Guidance still isn't specific enough around YEI Participants and eligibility what is a required and what is a nice to have?*
- *Think its adequate, would be good to have information on the types of posts which get the most attention, picked up most.*

- *There is a wide range of guidance documents to comment on (participants; eligible costs; challenge fund; etc.). Although a great effort has been made to improve upon previous versions of the participant guidance, I believe a lot of confusion remains on the use of national databases; what information they can verify; and how this should be evidenced (e.g. referral form; screenshots of databases; dedicated mailbox; etc.). I believe LPs still do not understand the difference between a Referral Form containing information taken from a database which has been verified/certified (e.g. address; dob; NI); and a referral form from an organisation who can be deemed as having an understanding of a participant's circumstances (e.g. Care Leaver).*
- *Seems to be fine - although EUMIS is a mess. Requirements change and nobody bothers to tell us, then they change again... and nobody bothers to tell us. On the whole - a session on EUMIS and what is trying to be achieved with it would be a big help.*
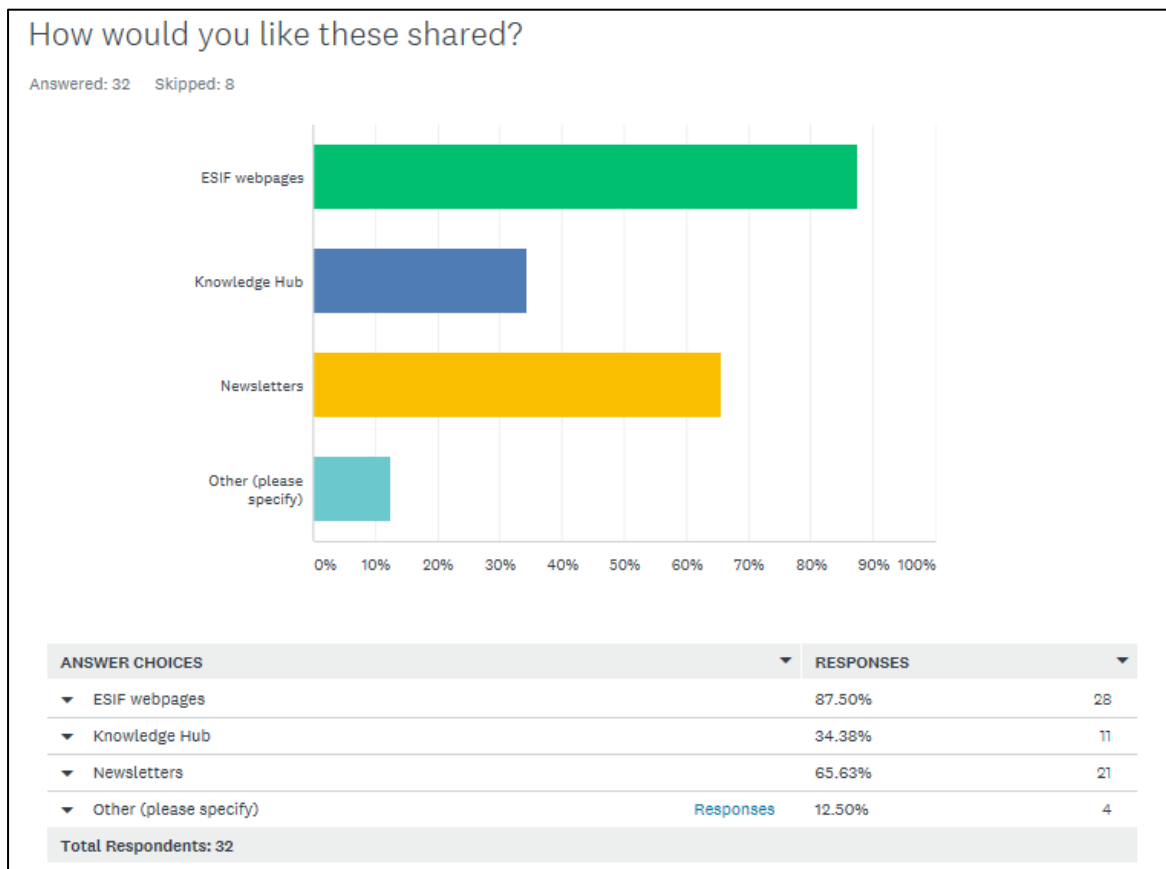- *Guidance gets updated and not in a timely fashion or reasonable notification of these changes.*

How do we best gather good news stories or examples of good practice?

- Email   -   3
- Lead partners/ delivery partners   -   13

Other lead partners have suggested their own methods including blogging and liaising with SG portfolio teams with the following additional comments:

- *We have been using blogs to more accurately capture people's day-to-day experiences of developing and delivering projects. These appear to be working well. Assistance from the Managing Authority would be welcomed to produce short case studies that could be hosted on the Scottish Government + other partners web sites.*
- *I think IRISS are brilliant examples of innovative leaders. look to them*
- *We liaise with our SG portfolio team on all aspects of our programme so perhaps feeding info through them would be helpful*
- *One suggestion could be to focus on 2 or 3 LA's / organisations per month / quarter and ask for good practice / good news stories. Another is to have every LA submit at least one good news story per month?*
- *Involve local SG staff more to meet the project staff & see first-hand what is being done*
- *Talk to local authorities - look on their websites*
- *Not sure anyone is confident of making these public until the programme is complete and we all know that we have withstood any audits.*
- *Via visits to lead partners and their delivery partners, standing agenda item at the group meetings like the one we just had. The informal sharing of good practice at the tables would lead to formal postings which would be a useful way to gather information.*

How would you like these shared?

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Answered: 32   Skipped: 8

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
ESIF webpages	87.50%	28
Knowledge Hub	34.38%	11
Newsletters	65.63%	21
Other (please specify) Responses	12.50%	4
Total Respondents: 32		

Other responses include:

Invite lead partners to speak at meetings
Email
social media