

ARIA Fund LAG (A-LAG) MEETING

16th August 2023

10:00 – 11:30

MS Teams

Attendees

LAG Members			
Non- Public Sector	Attended	Public Sector	Attended
Jean Brown (JB)	X	Eddie Bulik (EB)	X
Kevin Brown (KB)	X	Brian Connolly (BrC)	X from 10:40
Barbara Conner (BC)		Milissa McCulloch (MC)	X
Chris Campbell (CC)	X	Colin McKee (CM)	X
Claire Donaldson (CD)	X	Rosemary Ramsay (RR)	X
Holly Fitzsimmons (HF)			
Alistair (Ally) Henry	X		
Marie Oliver (MO)	X		
Jim Watson (JW)	X		
LAG Advisors			
		Emma Bernard (EB)	
		Sarah Smillie (SS)	
Lead Partner Representative(s)			
		Jamie Tait (JT)	

LAG Staff	Attended
Angela Lamont (AL)	X

Apologies

Barbara Connor (BC)

Acronyms

- CLLD Community Led Local Development
- CWB Community Wealth Building
- EAC East Ayrshire Council
- EOI Expression of Interest
- MoU Memorandum of Understanding
- NAC North Ayrshire Council
- NFUS National Farmers' Union of Scotland
- SAC South Ayrshire Council
- SG Scottish Government
- SRUC Scotland's Rural College

Welcome	Actions
<p>JW welcomed everyone to the meeting. AL introduced new LAG Members MM, CM and RR and JW invited round table introductions. AL also announced new LAG Advisor EB who was absent.</p> <p>Quorum The meeting started with 11 LAG Members, so was quorate with at least 50% of the 14 standing Members. This comprised 7 non-public sector and 4 public sector, fulfilling the minimum 51%: 49% non-public: public requirement. This increased to 12 from 10:40 with the arrival of BrC, a 5th public sector representative.</p>	

<p>Register of Interests AL reported it had been a year since the first registers of interest were taken and asked if Members were content there had been no changes since completing them. JW/JB agreed but CC requested a new form. AL to email LAG and ask question to cover all Members.</p> <p>Conflicts of Interest No conflicts of interest for agenda items were noted.</p> <p>Minutes of Last Meeting The meeting minutes of previous, 10th May 23 LAG meeting were approved. AL ran through the actions:</p> <p>Continued</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AL to pursue LAG Advisor representation for new priority themes, disability groups and groups from areas of deprivation from autumn 22. Tender brief in place/approved by LAG. To go out once SG 23/24 grant letter received. <p>AL reported the LAG had grown naturally since this action, with 4 new Members and 1 Advisor in net zero, the priority theme the LAG had lacked. New Member BrC had a speciality in CWB which would replace that lost through Emma McMullen and Mhairi Paterson of NAC. Disability groups/groups of deprivation could be represented by the TSIs. With that AL reported she felt the LAG was well represented and recommended the action be completed. JW agreed/there were no objections. Completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AL to seek remainder of Group Protocol signatures by email. JT outstanding. Completed. <p>New</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AL to re-circulate ARIA Priorities 23-24 table and gain feedback on example project types. Completed. AL to review video project brief and invite bidders outwith PCS if value <£10,000. Completed – The Ayrshire Film Co appointed. AL to circulate SCOTO community-led tourism proposal. Completed. EM to send on details of officers involved in the Regional Tourism Strategy. Completed/local intelligence seeking completed/Community Led Tourism brief developed. AL to contact AADA re: community-led tourism. Completed. AL to contact SAC Internal Audit re: 17% ‘on-cost’ proposal and quotes/cost evidence proposals. Completed, amended as in 22-23 guidance. AL to recontact SAC Internal Audit to propose in-depth cost checks on a minimum of 10-15% of applications/projects. Completed – approved by Internal Audit. AL to set date for Aug 23 LAG meeting. Completed. <p>LAG Member Updates/Lead Partner Changes Covered under Welcome.</p>	<p>AL to email LAG re: ROIs.</p>
<p>Fund/SG Update (Standing Item)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalisation Thresholds Update, SG <p>AL reported a change had been announced by SG on the capitalisation thresholds for Scottish CLLD funds. Previously, the limits stated were per item and there could be a number of these items per application, eg: 5 separate sets of solar panels at max £10k each (Enhancements to Buildings category), total £50k. The change had been that the thresholds given were the limits <i>per application</i>, so in the example, a maximum of £10k could be spent. AL stated this would affect a number of applications, competition for the capital pot, and the work required by the staff team in analysing costs. She reported she would inform applicants now that the LAG had been informed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expression of Interest (EOI)/Applications Update 	

<p>AL reported that as of Wed 9th Aug fund interest was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. information sessions: 20, approx 165 attendees. • No. application sessions: 5, approx 82 attendees. • Feedback from applicants was good with the support appreciated, in contrast to other funds. Replies to EOIs/email had largely been within 1 day. • EOIs received: SA – 38, EA – 37, NA – 40 (mostly Arran). AL predicted applications would roughly follow. • 70 – 80 applications expected in total. <p>Applications, @ 14th Aug 23:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 43 in draft form. • Approx. 55% business: 45% community/third sector, AL reported she thought this would even out. • Areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SA - 21%, SA/EA – 3% ○ EA - 31% ○ NA including Arran - 34% ○ Pan Ayrshire – 7% • Grant sizes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Revenue £506k, average £21k ○ Capital £110k, average £16k <p>AL commented the staff team were striving to manage volume and quality. Next year she recommended a separate EOI period and application development period prior to the closing date to improve focus/allow reviews for more applicants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing/Fund Finance (Standing Item) <p>AL reported recruitment of the Project Officer had not made significant progress since last LAG meeting, new Lead Partner representative JT having to gain Executive Leadership Team (ELT) as well as SAC Cabinet approval. AL understood ETL approval to have been in progress in April. She cast doubt on the quality of candidates attracted with a <6month contract and internal recruitment first.</p> <p>She commended the team of contractors working with ARIA at present and recommended continuing this until Mar 24. She presented figures on this, showing the projected spend was approx. 20% of full budget, and gave assurance that this would not go >25%, the LEADER limit.</p> <p>She suggested though recruitment of the Admin Assistant still go ahead, the pool of internal candidates being greater for this across SAC. If recruited this would take the projected contractor spend down. She sought approval on these recommendations, which was granted by all Members present (11 at the time, see Welcome section).</p>	
<p>Trust Based Grant Making</p> <p>AL reported with the volume of expected applications, it would not be possible to promise a second Technical Check post fund deadline, 18th Aug 23, and assessment would not involve the in-depth costs checks afforded pre-18th Aug (previously approved at minimum 10-15% of applications). She stated therefore that the accuracy of LEADER/previous ARIA applications may not be achieved in all cases. She had canvassed other funders on this who adopt a similar approach and tend towards trust-based grant making – decisions on what projects can offer communities without the minutiae. This precluded in-depth reviews on costs, judgements on value for money being employed more.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments. AL appealed to the LAG to bear the above in mind when assessing applications, and said she would alter the scoring sheet to reflect. Suggestions covered: 	<p>AL to revise LAG scoring sheet to reflect trust-based</p>

<p>a. Including a 'disclaimer' in the scoring sheet with LAG discretion to overlook minor discrepancies, within a limit acceptable to that Member.</p> <p>b. A comment box for comments on contentedness/otherwise with discrepancies.</p> <p>• Change Requests/Underspends</p> <p>AL reported many funders adopt a similar approach with change requests/underspends, allowing 'freedom', as long as new spend fits with the original aim of the project. She said with 40 – 50 projects, the present LAG approval on changes $\geq 10\%$ of total project costs would not be practical. She had gained insight into a number of methods, from the 10% approval to eg: internal approval $\leq \text{£}10\text{k}$, sub-group approval $\text{£}10\text{k} - \text{£}25\text{k}$ and full LAG approval $\text{£}25\text{k}$ to $\text{£}50\text{k}$. She reported this was perhaps too relaxed, and would revert to the LAG with a recommendation.</p>	<p>grant making/cover discrepancies.</p> <p>AL to revert to LAG with recommended new change request limit(s).</p>
<p>Teams Test</p> <p>AL reported that MS Teams was the means used by SAC for sharing of documents with external parties, so would be used for the LAG assessments. She said she would run a Teams test with LAG Members, asking each to check they could access. Concerns were raised with Teams acting differently on different systems, and other means such of file share were suggested. JW recommended AL run the Teams test first and gauge the outcome before exploring this. AL expressed concern at the availability of other methods through SAC, Teams having been the only one offered.</p>	<p>AL to run MS Teams test with LAG.</p>
<p>Grant Award Letters – 1st Oct 23</p> <p>AL raised the concern with the LAG that, with putting back the fund closing date the LAG assessment meetings would have to be WC 25th Sept 23. This meant that generating grant award letters for 1st Oct 23, the start date of most projects would be difficult/impossible. This was the start date advised to applicants because:</p> <p>a. It fitted with the previous 11th Aug 23 closing date.</p> <p>b. It gave a clear 5 month window for delivery of projects (until 28th Feb 24).</p> <p>She recommended therefore that spend be allowed in the grant award letters from 1st Oct 23, but this be worded that at the applicants' risk, especially where conditions were applied. She reported she had engaged SAC Internal Audit on this and they were content. Discussion arose but the LAG approved this unanimously, with the 12 LAG Members present (see Welcome section).</p>	
<p>AOCB & Next Meeting</p> <p>AL explained that, with 50+ applications to assess (Main and Communities into Action Funds), assessments would be best held over 2 meetings on 2 full days. With such a volume, she recommended projects and LAG be grouped with each group assessing a subset of projects, but full LAG present for final decision. The LAG assessment meetings were then set as Thurs 28th & Fri 29th Sept 23, all day in person in SAC County Buildings. AL to confirm and make arrangements.</p>	<p>AL to confirm dates/make arrangements for LAG assessment meetings.</p>

Actions

- AL to email LAG re: ROIs.
- AL to revert to LAG with recommended new change request limit(s).
- AL to revise LAG scoring sheet to reflect trust-based grant making/cover discrepancies.
- AL to run MS Teams test with LAG.
- AL to confirm dates/make arrangements for LAG assessment meetings.

James Watson

Jim Watson, LAG Chair
28th Sept 2023