



Developing Community Farming Projects, Cill Ulta

 Cill Ulta, County Donegal

Cill Ulta (LAN Ctr)

Cill Ulta (LAN Ctr) in Donegal Gaeltacht is a tomato growing enterprise supplying the Dublin early markets. When the price of oil increased in the 1980s, the enterprise was no longer profitable and the glasshouses were abandoned. In the late 1990's, Lárionad Acmhainní Nádúrtha (LAN), a non-profit with charitable status, was formed to use and revive the site.

The site now includes 9 production poly-tunnels, 1 acre of glasshouse, an apiary and production fields. LAN now operates as Cill Ulta, a Centre for Sustainability, promoting food sovereignty, sustainable energies, farm-to-fork research, Irish agricultural heritage and craft, and the Irish language.

EIP-AGRI project, Cúlra Créafóige (Cultivation Renewal Programme)

In 2017, Cill Ulta began the process of bidding to realise a 5-year EIP-AGRI project, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) and the EU - called Cúlra Créafóige.



The project focuses upon abandoned land parcels and works with landowners to investigate the crop and market potential of growing. Cúlra Créafóige uses modern, scientific versions of heritage practices so all farming activities are carried out in support of local biodiversity. Cúlra Créafóige works with a panel of internationally renowned ecologists and national bodies to monitor indicator species, and provides training in sustainable agriculture practices, biodiversity monitoring methods and cottage enterprise.



Interview Questions and Responses

How did your community agree the key objectives that you wanted your project to deliver?

Following the formation of Lárionad Acmhainní Nádúrtha (LAN), its key objective was to use and revive the existing farm site in Cloughaneely. By collectively working with local community groups, sports clubs, churches, businesses and individuals, Cill Ulta brought community members together to become a testbed via the Cúlra Créafóige (Cultivation Renewal Programme) project.

How did you decide upon a single project idea?

Cill Ulta, working in partnership with external partners, as identified that moving away from intensive farming and diversifying as a future opportunity for improving biodiversity and quality of locally grown food, utilising their experience in horticulture over three decades. They participated in the 5-year EIP-AGRI project, named Cúlra Créafóige.

Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects?

There has been very little opposition to the Cúlra Créafóige project. This has been achieved through working closely with local farmers and landowners through face-to-face public engagement and using expertise of a strong Board of Directors to build consensus with external funding agencies.

How did you approach planning and project management around your selected idea?

The project manager, Eithne Nic Lochlainn delivering Cúlra Créafóige, has approached managing the project in a highly collaborative way, identifying when to approach other members of the Cill Ulta community and others for expertise when necessary. For example, a member of the Cill Ulta Board is a solicitor by profession and deeply understands financial reporting processes for EU projects.

Regular meetings are organised between the project partners to ensure robust ongoing management of the project.



Funded through the Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund

How has that stood the test of time through the project? Have you had to revise your plans? How have you managed that process?

The approach to project management has currently stood the test of time. Eithne has to be able to adapt and revise plans accordingly through a continuously iterative process in collaboration with farmers, landowners and project partners. Eithne has strong project management skills with over 30 years of experience in community projects and managing EU funding.

How did you identify a funding need?

The community became aware of the EU funding opportunity through the network of existing project partners who were involved in developing the Hen Harrier Pilot Project (see <http://www.henharrierproject.ie/>).

To develop successful projects of this type requires experience of working to identify funds and building strong partnerships, alongside identifying closely related funds and putting in a dedicated resource for this process.

Registering with events through funding bodies, sharing the vision of your community with potential funders and horizon scanning through desk research was key for identifying EU funding.

How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

Bidding for EU funding is a full-time requirement which requires a deep understanding of how funding competitions are structured. As a long-established community organisation with existing capacity, Cill Ulta was well placed to undertake the bidding process in collaboration with partners in an Operational Group.

Did you have a need for specialist expertise for your project?

Access to expert and technical advice is critical for the Cúlra Créafóige project, with partners including Pobal, Údarás na Gaeltachta, SEAI, Donegal ETB and University College Dublin.

These partners were identified through existing industry and academic networks of Cill Ulta.

The funders of the project, EIP – AGRI, allowed Cill Ulta to purchase equipment and undertake the manual activities themselves and were flexible to allow Cill Ulta to hire resources appropriately.

What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome and how did you overcome them?

Many EU and nationally funded projects are funded 6 months after the project begins, often requiring 6 months of expenses to be claimed. Therefore the submission of expenses to EU and national level bodies is an important process and can create barriers for smaller community organisations, who often require bridging finance for launching projects similar to projects.

Providing dedicated paid or unpaid resource to manage the claim submission process is critical for overcoming this potential barrier.

Has the project team managed to stay true to the original project vision? If not, why not? If it has, how has this been achieved?

Cill Ulta has managed to remain true to the original project vision and the establishment of a well organised Operational Group with a strong project leader has enabled this to occur.

In addition, building consensus with local farmers and landowners has been key for the success of the project which has been driven by local expertise of Cill Ulta and project partners.

What have been the biggest learnings from the delivery of your project?

There is no “one-size-fits-all” method for communicating the benefits on sustainable farming to communities, however ensuring the community and farmers clearly understand the benefits of the project is important.

For community groups aiming to create a similar project, it is important to obtain community buy-in through careful messaging in person with potential landowners.

What decisions, or elements of organisation have been the most important in the delivery of your project?

Undertaking weekly management meetings from the outset of the project and establishing open lines of communications is key between project partners.

Ensuring that any language barriers between project partners are overcome at project launch is also important for successfully delivering projects involving local, national and international partners, such as Cúlra Créafóige.

What were the most important sources of advice and guidance for your group as you moved through the different phases of the project?

It is critical to identify local or regional expertise that can inform and support the community project. For communities, becoming members of organisations such as IrBEA is important for networking with producers, academic experts and consultants interested in knowledge exchange.

The project partners and the board were critical sources of advice and guidance for the project, alongside the internal staff at Cill Ulta as an established community organisation.

Key contacts

Eithne Nic Lochlainn, Cill Ulta: eithne@cillulta.ie

Stephen McCormack, IrBEA: stephenmccormack@irbea.org

Links

Organisation Website: <https://cillulta.ie/pages/who-we-are>

Project Website: <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/c%C3%BAIra-cr%C3%A9af%C3%B3ige-cultivation-renewal-programme>

YouTube (Project Overview): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFByZcrKZvE>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CulraCreafoige/>



Ferbane Food Campus and Innovation Centre

 Ferbane, County Offaly

In 2003 Ferbane Business & Technology Park was established to create a critical mass of industry which could boost employment. In the first phase, an office block and industrial unit were constructed.

After ESB vacated the top floor of the office building, feasibility studies recommended exploration of opportunities within the food sector. For Phase 2, the original industrial unit was sold and new industrial units were bought and divided into 3 Food Incubation Units.

All offices are now at full capacity. 40 people have established their own businesses, and 30 start-up food businesses have developed their food products. Over 300 local people have attended training courses prior to COVID-19, and 70 people are currently employed at the park.



For Phase 3, the Ferbane Business and Technology Park Ltd received €1,000,000 grant as part of the Just Transition Fund (Phase 2) to modify and extend existing buildings to support start-ups, existing business expansion and provide remote working facilities to people in West Offaly. The funding has the potential to increase employment at the park from 70 to 300.



Interview Questions and Responses

How did you decide upon a single project idea?

The Ferbane Business and Technology Park, as a limited company since 2008, has an objective to develop employment opportunities and drive local enterprise.

The board of the Ferbane Business and Technology Park agreed the objectives of Phase 3 and reflects the strategic priorities of local businesses at the park and community.

How did your group agree the key objectives that you wanted your project to deliver?

A feasibility study undertaken by a private consultant was funded by Offaly LEO, leading to the identification of Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the project. The board then realised the organisation needed to target a different sector in response to the decreasing activity of ESB and the feasibility supported this assumption. The feasibility study supported the idea of creating infrastructure to support the local food and drink sector.

Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects?

The organisation undertakes monthly board meetings to achieve consensus and has an annual AGM, providing a key opportunity for the community and local businesses to share their views and opinions on the future direction of the Ferbane Food Campus.

How did you approach planning and project management around your selected idea?

The organisation worked closely with different agencies, such as Enterprise Ireland, Offaly County Council, Offaly LEO and other groups for planning and managing the project.

The organisation obtained a grant to employ a manager for developing the Phases 1 and 2, funded by Enterprise Ireland for two years of a total of 4 years. Another manager was selected to support Phase 3 who acted as a mentor for people in the time-shared kitchens. This was critical for managing the project.



Funded through the Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

How has that stood the test of time through the project? Have you had to revise your plans? How have you managed that process?

The organisation and community are always adapting, with strategic plans and proposals always shaped by the board. The board has been a strong way for managing change consisting of an accountant, administrator and technical experts, alongside an interim manager 3 days per week.

How did you identify a funding need?

The Ferbane Food Campus had to grow and meet new market needs of the food and drink sector. The board identified more space and pursued an extension for Phase 3, and the funding opportunity from the Just Transition Fund was perfect timing.

In parallel, existing tenants required larger space and another tenant exited an adjacent building which went up for sale and bought by Ferbane Business & Technology Park Ltd. This enabled the conversion of space into two further kitchens and incubation units. Subsequently, those tenants have left the space and one business has taken all units.

Therefore, funding was required for expansion.

Prior to developing Phase 1

The project also benefited from a grant via ESB who were ceasing operating and launched the West Offaly Fund in the 1990s, providing €700,000 to initially launch the project. This was a critical injection of funding and the project would not have initially launched without this support.

How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

The Just Transition Funding requires experience and a large amount of documentation to be submitted, resulting in a challenging process. Kevin Gavin undertook this work on a voluntary basis, utilising his industrial experience from working at Bord na Mona.

Kevin drew upon his experience and expertise of the board members. For example, one board member is a civil engineer and could provide cost estimations for the project.

Did you have a need for specialist expertise for your project? If so how did you handle that and approach experts?

An architect for the project was openly procured through e-tenders and knew the building very well from Phases 1 and 2. Each of the board members has their own areas of expertise, in particular around civil engineering.

Directly approached ESB to support the installation of solar PV on the building. Kevin and the board are currently working with ESB to install the solar PV and overcome initial difficulties around meter installation and upgrades.

What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome and how did you overcome them?

Communication with tenants and contractors for the project was key and ensuring they were on board with the project. For developing sector specific projects, communities need to deeply understand what is involved within a proposed project and clearly understand objectives.

Pre-COVID-19, a meeting room was utilised by other community groups and which was key in keeping the wider community in Ferbane up to date. However, COVID-19 had a big impact upon community groups and we had to communicate messages virtually via online platforms such as Microsoft Teams.

Has the project team managed to stay true to the original project vision? If not, why not? If it has, how has this been achieved?

Although the community specifically wanted to target the food and drink sector, there are now rising costs and it is becoming a riskier sector of focus. However, the community has remained true to its original project vision of establishing additional space and facilities for food and drink businesses.

What have been the biggest learnings from the delivery of your project?

It is important for communities to have a very unified board which is very diverse. Having an engineer, an accountant and an expert in a sector is critical in a community group.

Carefully managing finances is key and ensuring transparency with the local community as the project develops is also an important lesson for communities.

What decisions, or elements of organisation have been the most important in the delivery of your project?

The key decision was launching the project with the local community as a focus and attracting business to generate employment over time through the phases of the Ferbane Food Campus.

Deciding to collaborate with Offaly County Council and bringing in wider partners was key too. This was underpinned by the formation of a Town Development Group in the 1990s and building relationships over time.

It is key to organise an appropriate structure and set up a limited or appropriate company, local government agencies can support this process such as the County Council or local LEO (Local Enterprise Office).

What were the most important sources of advice and guidance for your group as you moved through the different phases of the project?

Offaly County Council and Offaly LEO group were very helpful in supporting the project in identifying the opportunity from the Just Transition Fund.

Shannon Development as a former regional development body, now part of Enterprise Ireland, were very supportive before the launch of Phase 1 of the project in identifying ways to regenerate the greenfield site where the Ferbane Food Campus is currently located.

Key contact

Kevin Gavin, Ferbane Business and Technology Park
kevinpgavin@gmail.com

Links

Website: <https://www.ferbanefoodcampus.ie/food-producer/custom-content-item/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/foodcampus>



The Ludgate Hub

 Skibbereen, County Cork

The Ludgate Hub is a non-profit social enterprise which services businesses, start-ups, entrepreneurs, creatives and artists by providing a space to network, expand and scale businesses in West Cork. Since opening, the Ludgate Hub has enabled hot desks to be used 4,377 times, created 360 jobs and contributed €4 million to the local economy. The facility is home to event space, hot desks and state of the art meeting rooms.



Interview Questions and Responses

How did you as a community agree the key objectives that you wanted your project to deliver?

The key objective was to enable Skibbereen and rural communities in West Cork to thrive in a sustainable manner through enhanced digital connectivity. Business leaders and community representatives collectively agreed the objectives, influenced by organising such as Vodafone who were aiming to install fibre optic infrastructure across rural Ireland, including West Cork.

Within two months the first committee meeting had taken place, attended by eight influential business leaders and community focused individuals with a passion for West Cork to agree the future role of a digitally connected co-working hub.

How did you decide upon a single project idea that could deliver against those objectives?

The problem in West Cork was a lack of knowledge intensive jobs, so the community and business leaders wanted to attract knowledge intensive jobs to the region and retain young people.

Business leaders and the community collectively recognised a brain drain which needed tackling and a digital co-working hub was the main way to achieve the objectives in the public funding environment between 2014–2016.

However, the single project idea was enabled by the philanthropic donation of the Ludgate Hub's current building and the financing of refurbishment, meaning capital grant funding was not required.

Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects. Has that consensus held or does it remain challenged by some in the community? If so, how are you dealing with that?

The Ludgate Hub Team now identify gaps in West Cork in relation to digital skills and knowledge gaps in the community and labour market to target specific community groups.



Funded through the Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund

The consensus within Skibbereen is recognised by the Ludgate Hub and this has been achieved by the Hub continuously adapting and now offering education programmes to benefit the local and wider regional communities.

The full Ludgate Hub Board is made up of national and international partners, with a separate local Ludgate Hub Board actively agreeing and designing projects. The two tier approach has been critical for the Hub's success.

How did you approach planning and project management around your selected idea?

The Ludgate Hub team is small and expands in line with funding and delivering projects. The original planning and operations of the Hub required staff and volunteers with customer service and marketing skills responsible for managing the operations of office space for businesses.

The Ludgate Hub team now possesses individuals with strong project management community development and specialised sector specific skills. Therefore, planning and managing the Ludgate Hub and its programmes and projects requires a team which reflects its activity.

How has that stood the test of time through the project? Have you had to revise your plans. How have you managed that process?

The approach to planning and managing projects is driven by funding for the Ludgate Hub, whilst responding to the needs of the local community of Skibbereen, businesses and communities across West Cork.

Since Grainne joined the Ludgate Hub and acting as its current CEO, she has driven a process of actively using key funding networks in Enterprise Ireland, Cork County Council, Local Enterprise Offices and the Wheel to identify opportunities and expand its education programme reach. This process has been driven by the core team, full and local boards of the Ludgate Hub and networking with external organisations.

How did you identify a funding need?

The Ludgate Hub generates a set amount of revenue through rental of office space. However, there is a need for funding to cover the operations of the Hub and expanding its impact and activity.

The Ludgate Hub has a dedicated member of staff who identifies funding opportunities from national and EU sources and wider partners who can potentially provide grant funding or launch pilots in partnership with the Ludgate Hub. For example, Rethink Ireland funded the pilot for the West Cork Reignite Programme at the Ludgate Hub for supporting women in West Cork who were aiming to return to work following the COVID-19 pandemic.

How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

Applying for funding for supporting the Ludgate Hub's operations and wider programme delivery is managed internally. This is driven by the core Ludgate Hub team who also manage the wider funding process following award, from designing programmes to complying with monitoring and reporting.

What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome and how did you overcome them?

The primary barrier is securing funding and securing longer term funding for programmes and operations of the Ludgate Hub. This primary barrier has been overcome by hiring a dedicated resource for identifying funding and partnership opportunities, and applying for a wide range of funding opportunities.

Has the community managed to stay true to the original project vision? If not, why not? If it has, how has this been achieved?

Rural regeneration through digital connectivity was the original project vision and the Ludgate has achieved this and expanded into delivering more dedicated education programmes alongside digitally connecting working spaces.

What have been the biggest learnings from the delivery of your project?

Key learnings include:

- Know your potential market
- Deeply understanding your community and wider region
- Establish an active and passionate board for strategy and delivery
- Tailor your plan for the size of the community you wish to support

What decisions, or elements of organisation have been the most important in the delivery of your project?

There was an opportunity to develop a second Ludgate Hub site for co-working. However, the opportunity has changed and hybrid is becoming normalised. Therefore the board concluded that a second site may not be required and to avoid oversupply in West Cork.

Generating demand through social media and traditional media is important for the success of a Hub, an activity which has been undertaken since the launch of the Ludgate Hub.

What were the most important sources of advice and guidance for your community as you moved through the different phases of the project?

The local ETB (Education and Training Board), Cork County Council, the Local Enterprise Office, Enterprise Ireland, and West Cork Development Partnership have all been key organisations for designing programmes and shaping the direction of the Hub.

Key contact

Grainne O'Keefe, The Ludgate Hub
info@ludgate.ie

Links

Website: <https://www.ludgate.ie/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ludgateSkibbereen>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ludgateireland/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/ludgate/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/LudgateIreland>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxZOZZcqZQW6YG6tcc85nLQ>