

**RURAL
PACT**



Creating Community Groups in the Rural Pact

Practical Guide

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1 Introduction

The Rural Pact (RP) aims to raise the voices of rural actors, put their needs higher in the political agendas, support networking and boost action on the ground. The Rural Pact Community Platform (RPCP) is a key tool for achieving the objectives of the Rural Pact. It is an online space that brings together all members of the Rural Pact Community who wish to find peers, information on events, news as well as partners to collaborate with to work and contribute to the Rural Vision.

The RPCP provides a specific functionality to create **Community Groups** of stakeholders to facilitate structured exchanges and discussions around common fields of interest (e.g. thematic and/or geographic) such as social entrepreneurship, rural revitalisation, smart villages, renewable energy communities, etc.). Community Groups, if used strategically, can be of outstanding value for contributing to the objectives of the Rural Pact by encouraging broader stakeholder partnerships in key thematic fields, and enabling peer exchanges to boost actions on the ground. There are many policy initiatives across EU countries (e.g. SmartRural27, BCO, Territorial Agenda 2030, Talent Booster Mechanism, etc.), projects (e.g. Horizon Europe funded projects) and work conducted by organisations which can find advantages in creating and moderating Community Groups within the Rural Pact Community Platform to sustain the networks and partnerships built in those initiatives. Within countries, there are a number of organisations with potential to contribute but who do not have the means to develop such a collaborative platform and could benefit from accessing this European tool, using it in their own language. This could support the objectives of the Rural Pact for amplifying rural voices, supporting networking and mutual learning and encouraging commitments to act by providing national stakeholders with an online space to organise their collective action. At first stage, priority would be given to European and national level organisations willing to develop interaction across Europe and in specific member states (e.g. national rural parliaments etc.).

This document provides ideas and practical tools to materialise the creation and implementation of Communities for action in the RPCP, including criteria for community creation and process. The document also includes the practical tools to be applied by the platform developers to put in practice the process for the creation and management of the Communities. To support the creation of Communities for action, the Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO) can provide direct tailored advice, guidance and technical support to community coordinators.

2 Communities Groups in the Rural Pact Community Platform

Communities Groups are dedicated spaces created within the RPCP that will bring relevant stakeholders together (e.g. public authorities, civil society organisations, academics, citizens and businesses) to connect, exchange and work on common fields of interest (e.g. thematic and/or geographic). This approach enables members of the Rural Pact to coordinate their efforts and actions in common areas while demonstrating their commitment and contribution to the Rural Pact objectives and those of the long-term vision for rural areas.

Community Groups aim to address specific and strategic needs on a particular field of interest serving as a way to amplifying rural voices within the Pact and across Europe. Ultimately the power of the communities is rooted in collaborative and inclusive arrangements that help to create opportunities for collaboration and which serve the priorities of the community members. The Community Group's

strength relies in the extent to which they engage the full range of stakeholders to deliver opportunities and activities in the common field of interest and/or achieve the objective they have collectively adopted.

Community Groups may be targeted to specific groups of stakeholders (e.g. smart villages, energy communities, LAGs, academic grouping, etc...) or open to a diverse target population such as public authorities, civil society organisations, researchers, citizens and businesses. The types of stakeholders of each community will depend on the purpose and common interest of the community. While there is value in giving to the Community Groups a transnational nature to maximise the value of the Rural Pact, Communities, as mentioned above, could also be created with a national nature.

Each Community Group is created, led, animated and moderated by one or more stakeholder organisation(s) or institution(s) with a relevant track record on the focus of the Community Group they wish to create, and who will act as '**Community Coordinator(s)**'. Coordinators of each Group may be from a single leading organisation or based on a close partnership between two or more organisations or institutions.

Once a Community Group is created, members of the RPCP can apply to join the community. By doing so, they commit to contribute to the specific objectives defined for the Community Group.

A Community Group is created to work in **one language**, which will drive communication within the online space dedicated to the Group. This can be English, which might be the most suitable for transnational Community Groups, or an EU language, which most likely would be adopted for national level Community Groups. The RPCP will be equipped with automated translation, allowing users to read exchanges in their native language but this **translation can only work if the page to translate is in only one language**.

2.1 Aims and objectives

Community Groups created within the RPCP can enable the delivery of shared objectives of the Rural Vision and of the Pact itself. In addition, Community Groups can achieve a range of goals including:

- > enabling strategic and coordinated action(s) to address needs and opportunities in specific common fields of interest (both thematically and/or geographically focus);
- > demonstrating the commitment and contribution of socio-economic sectors and public administrators on the delivery of the Rural Vision and the Pact;
- > boosting the creation of new relationships between stakeholders' common fields of interest, including the identification of needs and opportunities for rural areas;
- > enabling the creation of collaborative projects to support the achievement of the Rural Vision shared goals and of the Rural Pact;
- > creating opportunities to develop, strengthen and sustain networks and collaborations across sectors, actors, regions and countries so to leverage European and national funding opportunities;
- > facilitating targeted exchanges and connections among key actors in relevant common fields of interest for the Rural Vision;

- > enabling RP community members to achieve their individual goals, including through pooling of resources and building synergies with peers;
- > creating or hosting existing communities of practice and networks that can foster new collaborations and partnerships to share practice and create collaboration opportunities;

The value of the Community Groups emerges from the collective action of the group and all its members. When joining a Community Group, stakeholders need to have a clear understanding of the purpose of the community so they can contribute to it.

Example of purposes for specific Community Groups could be:

- > Raising awareness of challenges faced by stakeholders in a particular thematic field, as well as sharing opportunities.
- > Building capacities of its members by enabling sharing knowledge, news and events, training, publications, etc.
- > Creating opportunities to build collective project and initiatives.
- > Triggering the development of commitments to act for the rural vision and the Rural Pact.

The specific aims and added value of a community should be articulated before its creation and contribute to address needs, challenges and opportunities within the common fields of interest. Nonetheless, Coordinators of Community Groups will be able to review the objectives and purposes of the Group if considered appropriate.

2.2 Principles of the Community Groups

Community Groups within the RPCP should be created respecting the following principles:

- > **Members-led:** Community Groups should be owned by the participating organisations in line with their needs and priorities. The approach should enable the Community Groups to address the priority needs, challenges and opportunities in their respective thematic field or country.
- > **Collaborative:** Community Groups should be a shared responsibility of their members. Through active participation and collaboration of its members, a community can create opportunities for practical action at different levels, from individual organisations and specific groupings across administrative levels and countries where relevant.
- > **Inclusive:** Community Groups may build on existing networks or cooperation but should also be open to a wider community that shares the goals of the Group, and which may extend beyond existing networks.
- > **Sustainable:** The approach to the coordination and management of the Community Groups to help it achieve its objectives is maintained in the long term (e.g. building them on existing projects and initiatives, whilst supporting new activities and members).
- > **Respectful:** Coordinators and members of the community commit to remain polite and respectful of other members. Inappropriate behaviour or discourse should be moderated by the lead Coordinators of the Group.

Also, the participation in the Community Groups is guided by agreed **Charter of principles**¹ with all the members joining the groups to create a safe, respectful, and enriching environment for everyone involved.

2.3 Key elements in a Community Group

The precise design of a Community Group should be guided by needs, challenges and opportunities around the common field of interest of its members. The key elements of a Community Group are provided below:

- > A **concrete and meaningful purpose** outlining the strategic view for the community, the key needs, challenges, opportunities within the common field of focus. It also includes an articulation of the shared objectives and actions for the Community Group so it acts as a reference point for the Rural Pact members.
- > An **engaged community of members** that gives opportunities for creating collaborations and sharing experiences. It is equally important to both engage the members of the existing networks as well as to seek new relationships to expand the Community Group. Community Groups should aim to extend the reach of their membership, and actively create new opportunities for members to identify and develop potential new relationships and collaborations.
- > **A focus on action and impact.** Community Groups should seek to encourage actions that contribute to the implementation of the Rural Vision and the Rural Pact. Each Community Group will have to outline in practical terms how the Group will contribute to the Rural Vision and Rural Pact in the respective common field of focus. Setting clear commitments and tracking progress enables the Community Group and its members to demonstrate their contribution to the Vision and Pact.

2.4 The Community Group Coordinator(s)

The delivery of a Community Group aims and objectives is a collective endeavour of its members, although Community Coordinators play a key role in the success of the community.

Community Coordinators can be one or more organisations and / or institutions that wish to coordinate, animate and manage a community within the RPCP to achieve concrete objectives that contribute to the Rural Vision and Pact. The Coordinator(s) is the main interlocutor representing the Community Group with the European Commission and the Rural Pact Support Office.

Community Coordinators should be recognised actors with the capacity to mobilise relevant stakeholders, and their role and responsibilities include:

1. Community Group creation
 - > Exchange with potential partners and submit the Expression of Interest for the creation of a Community Group with all the information requested in the form. This information will be used to describe the Group in the platform;

¹ [Principles for the participation in the Rural Pact Community Groups](#)

2. Community management, engagement and facilitation
 - > Support and animate the Community Group to achieve its aims and objectives, steering the community progress and impact;
 - > Engage with community members by sharing information, triggering discussions, responding to queries, and encouraging active participation;
 - > Foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity within the community by promoting a respectful and open dialogue;
3. Strategic objectives and focus of the Community Group
 - > Collaborate with stakeholders and community members to update community objectives, expected outcomes in order to create an inclusive community;
4. Content moderation and quality assurance
 - > Monitor user-generated content to ensure compliance with community behavioural, and ethical standards in line with the 'Principles for the participation in the Rural Pact Community Groups' (see above);
 - > Manage flagged or reported content by community members, addressing violations promptly and appropriately;
5. Community growth and outreach
 - > Develop and execute strategies to attract and retain community members, fostering growth and diversity;
 - > Collaborate with other relevant stakeholders to promote the community and attract new users through various channels;
6. Feedback collection and analysis
 - > Gather and analyse feedback from the members regarding their experiences, concerns and suggestions for improving the user experience in the community and platform;
 - > Report to the RPSO any relevant feedback to enhance the community or any technical issues encountered in the platform.

2.5 The role of the Rural Pact Support Office

The Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO) underpins the delivery of the Rural Pact. It provides networking opportunities for Pact members alongside knowledge activities such as webinars, collection of good practices, as well as communications activities raising awareness of the Pact.

The RPSO can provide direct advice and support to Community Coordinators to assist them in the creation and development of Community Groups. The precise focus of support is dependent on the needs and priorities of the Community Group and its Coordinators. Support may include:

- > mapping potential partners to coordinate the group as well as members;
- > providing advice and support for the defining the objectives of the community;
- > promoting the group to help enlarge its membership with relevant actors;
- > facilitating knowledge exchange with other communities and initiatives;
- > enabling involvement and participation in the activities of the Rural Pact;

2.6 Developing a Community Group in the Rural Pact Community Platform

This section outlines some of the main elements and steps that underpin the development of a Community Group. The section highlights the importance of creating an approach that enables collaboration between members and opportunities to identify and address key needs, challenges and opportunities within a specific and relevant common field of interest for stakeholder and for the Rural Vision and Pact. Community Groups should be developed through a flexible approach that fits the function and priorities of its members.

2.6.1 Expression of interest for the creation of a Community Group

The process for the creation of a Community Group starts with the expression of interest (Eol) submitted by the potential coordinator(s) through a dedicated [Eol form](#) which is available in the Rural Pact Community Platform. Only members of the Rural Pact Community Platform can express interest to create a Community Group.

Through the Eol form, the coordinator(s) state(s) the aims of the Community Group, in coherence with the needs, challenges and opportunities related to their common field of interest and of the objectives of Rural Vision and Rural Pact. Key information to be submitted through the Eol form includes:

- > **General information from the coordinator(s)**, including relevant experience, motivation to create the group, links with existing networks and members relevant for the Community Group.
- > **Description of the context** outlining the needs, challenges, opportunities in the specific thematic area of focus for the Community Group.
- > **Objectives and main purpose of the Community Group**, indicating contribution to the ambitions of the Rural Vision and the Rural Pact;
- > **Main outcomes expected** from the Community Group which can guide the collective work of the members of a group. It may include concrete activities and actions that are aimed to be implemented with/by the group (e.g. commitment to participate in collaborative activities, sharing of knowledge, disseminating of outputs, delivering training and development opportunities, sharing best practices or policy recommendations, delivering activities and events to increase the reach of membership through multistakeholder events or awareness raising activities that can be established, producing relevant publications, etc.).
- > **Membership**, outlining the targeted stakeholders for the Community Group, their role(s) as members of the group, including principles for participation and benefits of being involved.

In practice, the initial set up of a Community Group may be developed through close collaboration of a smaller group of lead organisations or institutions who are already working together on a common field of interest (thematic or geographic). Community Groups will expand their membership through their activities within the Rural Pact Community Platform and with the support of the RPSO. However, it is important that Community Coordinator(s) engage with a sufficient range of stakeholders and partners at the outset to generate support for the Community Group. The RPSO can help Community Coordinators in the development of the Eol and promoting through targeted communication the community to specific stakeholder groups.

The submission of the Eol form for the creation of a Community Group is the starting point for a dialogue between the coordinators and the RPSO and relevant services of the European Commission, to define and launch the Community Group within the Rural Pact Community Platform.

Interested European and national stakeholder organisation(s) and institute(s) should submit an expression of interest to create a Community Group by filling in the following form and submitting it to info@rural-pact.eu.