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**A Step by Step guide
on
Forming Commonage Groups.**

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SUAS

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1 Introduction

This guide is based on the experience of the SUAS Project to ‘develop and evaluate a practical, stakeholder led and bottom up scheme to address the complex agricultural, environmental and socio-economic challenges associated with the land management of the Wicklow/Dublin uplands.’ It has been prepared with a view to being included in the Commonage Management Handbook that will be published at the end of the pilot.

The pilot was conducted in three phases; in the first phase, conducted in 2018, three groups were supported in their development; in the second phase, conducted in 2019, a further four groups were supported and in the third phase conducted in 2021, seven groups were supported in their development.

2 Overview

Methodology

The methodology involves a range of activities, including a series of meetings with the commonage group members.

The facilitation approach is tailored to support the practical stakeholder-led, ‘bottom-up’ approach of the pilot and to be ‘farmer-friendly’ in terms of timings and locations.

Key steps in the process include:

- The formation of the group Facilitation Team
- An initial one-day workshop to introduce the process and provide some learning support. This may be done with several groups at the same session (up to approx. 25 people)
- 1 individual session with each commonage group (CG) working on group development and the preparation of individual group constitutions
- 1 one-day workshop that may be conducted with several CGs some time after the groups have formed and begun implementation of their plans.

Facilitation Team

In the SUAS Project, the group development process was supported by a Facilitation Team consisting of the project manager and an external facilitator.

The project manager was well known to the groups, by virtue of his Teagasc background, was familiar with the local and technical issues of the commonages and was strongly committed to implementing the project.

The external facilitator brought expertise in facilitation, group formation, organisational development and governance and an independent external perspective, providing a balance to the Teagasc perspective.

The team element was important, partly because of the value of 2 brains and 2 perspectives and partly because of the workload in preparing for, chairing, facilitating, documenting and following up the meetings. The experience in the pilot suggests that 2 people are required to support the workshops. It was notable that, in Phase 2, as the Facilitation Team became more comfortable with the process, there was a smoother flow to the meetings. In phase 3, both facilitators attended the initial workshop but only the project manager attended the individual group sessions.

3 Meeting 1

This is the initial one-day workshop to introduce the process and provide some learning support. This may be done with a number of groups at the same session (up to approx. 25 people).

In phase 3 there were a number of commonage groups who would have only two members, so it was decided to have separate meetings for the small groups and the larger groups to ensure discussion were kept relevant.

Meeting Objectives

The objectives are that by the end of the first meeting:

- Participants will have a good understanding of the project
- The Facilitation Team will have a good understanding of how to engage with the participants, including their motivation, capacities, issues and concerns
- Agreement will be reached on an action plan to support constitution development and commonage group formation

Venue and facilities

Where possible the venue should be residential and in a secure, quiet out-of-town location.

The workshop room should be a large, quiet, well-ventilated and well-lit room with windows and should have:

- A plenary space sufficient for chairs to be arranged in a semi-circle around a screen / flip-charts, with a table for a data projector and a table for notes, hand-outs and props.
- Work-spaces in room where participants can work in groups of up to 5.
- Posting space for posting flip-charts.

There should be space nearby for refreshments to be served during coffee breaks and lunch should be close to the main room.

Sample Letter of invitation

Below is a sample letter of invitation to the participants of the workshop.

Dear Participant,

We are holding our first workshop on InsertDate, InsertTime at the InsertLocationAddress.

The workshop will be run by the Facilitation Team, consisting of InsertName, Project Manager, and InsertName, Facilitator.

The objectives are that by the end of the workshop (Insert Meeting Objectives here, sample below):

- *Participants will have a good understanding of the project*
- *The Facilitation Team will have a good understanding of how to engage with the participants, including their motivation, capacities, issues and concerns*
- *Agreement will be reached on an action plan to support constitution development and commonage group formation*

An agenda for the workshop is attached (InsertAgendaHere).

Administration details to be inserted here (meals, travel, expenses etc)

We look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Agenda Meeting 1 for larger groups

Time	Mins	Session	Notes
09:00		Onsite prep	Workshop Facilitation Team arrives and prepares
10:00		Welcome	Welcome Plan for the day (objectives, timing, ground-rules)
10:10		The Project	Presentation by Facilitation Team to give background & key goals, approach (farmer led, support by project), funding, constraints, timing
10:30		Brief Q&A	Questions for clarification (detailed discussion later)
11:00		Individual Introductions & Tea/Coffee	Who, Where, Work, Commonage Interest, Why interested in this project, What I can offer, my Concerns Small group (2-3) interview exercise over coffee followed by introductions in plenary (each person introduces a colleague)
11:45		Effective Commonage Groups	Characteristics of successful groups? Facilitated discussion
12:15		Group Exercise Briefing	Group Development Plan: Briefing for exercise with questions of clarification
12:30		<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Eat, chat, fresh air, phone-calls et</i>
13:15		Group exercise	In each commonage group, a) check where the group is against agreed characteristics and b) agree measures to strengthen & support needed Work in small groups, max size 5 (if large, split into smaller)
14:00		Presentation	Each group presents its analysis (10' each) Brief discussion and exchange of ideas
14:50		<i>Stretch break</i>	
15:00		Project Action Plan	Present draft action plan & check vs group exercise Discuss, review & agree
15:45		Evaluation	Evaluation of this meeting (thinking of future meetings): good things to keep, how to make even better, other comments
15:55		Closing circle	One brief closing remark from each participant
16:00		<i>Coffee/Tea</i>	<i>Opportunity for informal group meetings before leaving!</i>
16:30		Depart Debrief	Participants depart Facilitation Team debrief on workshop, noting key points emerging
17:30		End	

4 Agenda for the evening

Time	Session	Notes
09:00	Onsite prep	Workshop facilitation team arrives and prepares (DB & BL)
17:00	Welcome	<p>Welcome (DB)</p> <p>Plan for evening (objectives, style, timing, ground-rules) (BL)</p> <p>Introductions: Name Commonage Involvement Why interested in this? Hope & Concerns</p>
17:15	The Project	<p>Presentation by project manager (DB), background, key goals, approach (farmer led, support by project), funding, constraints, timing, commonage groups, commonage management plan</p> <p>Previous Experience: What have we learned from experience with other groups (evaluation and experience)? What worked well, how to be even better, other comments?</p>
	Brief Q&A	Questions for clarification (detailed discussion later)
17:45	Good Groups	<p>Why a 'group' (separate entity, formal 'contracts', grants etc)</p> <p>What can help our group work well?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal agreement (Constitution / Memo of Understanding) • Regular / Good meetings • Conflict Management – Negotiation • Other (to be discussed)
18:15	Constitution	<p>Key points for this group (maybe MoU)</p> <p>Run through the template</p> <p>What to remove (add?)</p>
18:45	Meetings	<p>What makes for good meetings</p> <p>Purpose, participants, notice, agenda, timing, chairing/participation, minutes, follow-up.. other?</p>
19:00	Negotiation	See notes below
19:15	Project Action Plan	<p>Present draft action plan (group development, constitutions, commonage management plan etc).</p> <p>Agree dates for individual group meetings</p> <p>Discuss, review & agree</p>
19:30	Evaluation	Evaluation of this meeting (thinking of future meetings): good things to keep, how to make even better, other comments
19:45	Close of meeting	Participants depart
20:00	Debrief	BL & DB debrief on workshop, noting key points emerging
20:30	End	BL & DB depart

Structured Discussion (Meeting)

- Issues to address (advance notice)
- Clarify and understand issues, what are the options (see Getting to Yes)
- If no resolution, call in a 3rd party to help mediate

Getting to Yes – a 'well-formed outcome)

1. Separate People from Problem
2. Interests not positions
3. Options for mutual gain
4. Agreed Objective Criteria
5. BATNA

5 Meeting 2

This meeting is an individual commonage group (CG) meeting working in detail on group development and the preparation of group constitutions.

Agenda Meeting 2

Below is a sample agenda.

Name of Commonage Group Meeting	Agenda
<i>Date:</i>	<i>Location:</i>
<i>Time:</i>	

Item	Notes
1. Attendance (List all present): Apologies: Introductions (if needed):	
2. Meeting Management <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree interim chair (suggest Facilitator) for 1st meeting)• Review & Approve Minutes of last meeting (briefly review report from previous meeting)• Matters arising (items not on agenda below)	
3. Group Membership and Shares Confirm for record	
4. Constitution <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss and agree key points (see worksheet constitution template)• Agree follow-up action (e.g. draft, circulate and agree at next meeting)	Circulated
5. Any other business	
6. Summary of key points and agreed actions	
7. Evaluation: This meeting? What worked well, any improvements? Our group? What works well, any improvements?	
8. Next meeting: Key items, Date & time	

Meeting 2 support material

Constitution Preparation Worksheet

Section	Points	Notes
1. Name		
2. Definitions	Shareholder?	
3. Address		Could be that of the secretary at the time
4. Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full • Associate • Voting • Application and Cessation 	Non-voting? Resignation, Removal (2/3 majority?)
5. Purpose and Objects	Good management, economy & ecology	
6. Powers	See sample	
7. General Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing & Notice • Business • Attendance • Quorum • Voting Rights • Decision-making (consensus) 	
8. Regular Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency • Timing • Notice • Quorum • Conduct, including Minutes 	
9. Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair • Vice-Chair • Secretary • Treasurer 	Conditions (members of commonage... for chair / vice-chair) Secretary may be external Treasurer - if receiving funds.
10. Liabilities	•	No liability except through wilful default
11. Finance		
12. Data Protection		
13. Miscellaneous		
14. Notices		
15. Alteration to Constitution		Only at a General Meeting by a three quarter vote?
16. Dissolution		Requires 75% of votes Assets distributed equally between members?

6 Meeting 3

Agenda Meeting 3

This meeting is the second of two commonage group (CG) meetings working in detail on group development and the preparation of individual group constitutions.

Name of Commonage Group	Agenda
<i>Date:</i>	<i>Location:</i>
<i>Time:</i>	

Item	Notes
1. Attendance (List all present): Apologies:	
2. Meeting Management <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree interim chair• Review & Approve Minutes of last meeting (copy circulated)• Matters arising (items not on agenda below)	
3. Constitution <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of constitution, a copy of which was circulated, for adoption at inaugural meeting	Copy circulated
4. Roles of officers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chair, Secretary and Treasurer• How these roles will operate within your Commonage Group• Good Meeting Management	Document circulated
5. Documentation, <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Templates for Meeting Agenda and Minutes• Records• Other	
6. Any Other Business <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update on ecologist's progress to date	
7. Summary of key points and agreed actions	
8. Next meeting: Key items: Inaugural meeting Date & time: Location:	

Meeting 3 support material

Planning Good Meetings

- Purpose and priorities: for each meeting
- Preparation: Planning, People and Information (Agenda and Papers))
- Participation: all voices heard, good discussion, differences managed well, consensus
- Paperwork: Agenda and papers in advance, minutes issued promptly, KISS)
- Time keeping
- Follow-Up
- Others

Role of Chair

- Good functioning of meetings (see below)
- Spokesperson
- Other – to be confirmed

Role of Secretary

- Recording minutes of meeting
- Helping chair to plan and arrange meetings
- Dealing with correspondence
-

7 Minutes template

Below is a template for the minutes of the meetings of the commonage groups. For reasons of confidentiality actual sample minutes are not included.

Minutes of Meeting		Group Name:
Day:	Date:	Start-Time: Finish-time:
Location:		
	Items	Who/When
1.	Attendance (List all present): Apologies received: Introductions (if needed):	
2.	Meeting Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review & Approve Minutes of last meeting • Matters arising (items from last meeting not on this agenda, e.g. reports on agreed actions) 	
3.	Agenda item Decisions made?, Action to take?	
4.	Agenda item Decisions made?, Action to take?	
5.	Agenda item Decisions made?, Action to take?	
6.	Any other business To be used for small items of information, not major decisions	
7.	Evaluate the meeting What worked well, how to be even better?	
8.	Next meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key items • Date & time • Place 	

8 Meeting 4

Introduction

A second meeting involving a number of CG's may be held later in the process, when CGs have had time to develop some experience in their work.

Draft objectives and an outline agenda are provided below.

Purpose and Objectives

The main purpose of the meeting is for those attending to review and share experience on the functioning of their groups.

The objectives (draft) are that by the end of the workshop participants will have:

- Reviewed progress in implementing their commonage management plans
- Identified how the implementation of the project can be further strengthened, including what to keep and what to change (and how).
- Reviewed and shared experience in working together on this management plan, including
 - Conduct of meetings
 - Roles and expectations of officers
 - Good functioning of their groups
 - Any other relevant points
- Reviewed and discussed other aspects of the project

Draft agenda for Meeting 4

Note – this is a draft agenda for development

Time	Mins	Session	Notes
10:00		Welcome	5' Welcome 10' Plan for the day: Objectives, timing, ground-rules, review evaluation of first group meeting, see below
10:15		Introductions	20' Each group introduces itself to others (members' names, commonage description, nature of shareholding, current state of play in group development) (using chart & map developed). 5' Q&A.
10:35		Project Update	Brief update on project with Q&A
11:00		<i>Tea/Coffee</i>	
11:20		Progress update by groups	A brief update on progress with the practical tasks in the project, to be discussed in each group (15') and then presented by a representative of each group present, maximum of 10' per group, with a short plenary discussion
12:20		Evaluation	Evaluation of the whole process thus far, 3x3x3 group exercise: good things to keep, how to make even better, other comments. This exercise will flag some points for discussion in the afternoon
13:00		<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Eat, chat, fresh air, phone-calls et</i>
13:45		Group functioning	Short plenary discussion on what helps our groups work well, covering meetings, officers, documents, and other points Each group to review how their group is working and what measures they plan to make them work even better Each group to briefly share their reviews on group functioning Plenary discussion on key points emerging – sharing of experience
15:00		Evaluation Points	Plenary discussion on key points emerging from the evaluation in the morning
15:30		Concluding session	Key points emerging from the day, with implications for the future of the groups
16:00		Closing circle	One brief closing remark from each participant
16:10		<i>Close</i>	<i>Coffee / Tea/ Informal group meetings / Depart</i>