

EU low carbon funding support for GBSLEP

Lead Organisation:

Sustainability West Midlands

Project Manager: Alan Carr (Sustainability Adviser)

Partners:



Customers:

Those working within the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) area wanting to collaborate and develop projects ready for the Priority 4 (Low Carbon) strand of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programme.

Project Duration:

Jan 2016 – on-going.

The Project

Providing a mechanism to create a low carbon economy in Birmingham and Solihull

GBSLEP has obtained over £100m from the ERDF part of the European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF) 2014-2020 programme. Over £15m of this money is required to be spent against the Priority 4 (Low Carbon) strand of the programme. All projects put forward must adhere to specific requirements and they must also fit into one or more of five pre-defined sub-categories:

- Promoting the production and distribution of energy derived from renewable sources.
- Promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy use in enterprises.
- Supporting energy efficiency, smart energy management and renewable energy use in public infrastructure, including in public buildings and in the housing sector.

- Promoting low carbon strategies for all types of territories, in particular for urban areas, including the promotion of sustainable multimodal urban mobility and mitigation- relevant adaptation measures.
- Promoting research and innovation in, and adoption of, low carbon technologies.

SWM's role is to provide technical assistance to Solihull MBC, Priority 4 Low Carbon theme leads for GBSLEP, to use our knowledge and expertise around low carbon projects, innovation, collaborative working and European funding to work with partners to help identify suitable projects for submission against this funding stream.

Aims

The primary aims of our role as technical assistance partners are as follows:

- To market information about the programme to our relevant networks and partners.
- To build technical capacity in organisations wishing to apply for this strand of funding.
- To enhance project development.
- To ensure all projects are ERDF compliant.
- To deliver capacity building events and follow-up support actions according to need.

Challenges

This fund is currently one of the main accessible sources of money to help stimulate the low carbon economy and reduce carbon emissions. However, accessing the funds is not without its challenges.

To the organisations looking to access the funding:

The workshop we convened in May 2016, hosted by SWM members Aston University, invited partners looking to access the fund and asked them to outline what challenges they have faced to date or may face in future. These included financial barriers, confusing definitions and guidance, difficulty developing strong collaborations and other challenges such as meeting required outputs.

An additional challenge since we ran this workshop is the UK's decision to leave the European Union, although in November 2016 it was confirmed that this programme will run its course.

To SWM as technical assistance partners:

Challenges we have faced in this role have included the following.

- Identifying partners: The reality is that hundreds of



partners could conceivably be interested in accessing this funding. Our networks, which provide extensive outreach, will cover many of these, but it is important to involve as many organisations as possible. Our job is to do this but without the process becoming unwieldy.

- **Overcoming barriers:** The barriers identified above by our partners often require resolution at national level. We would love to solve these problems for them but sadly it is impossible to do so! There is a role for us, therefore, to manage expectations and to keep up to speed as much as possible with any changing guidance, for example. Indeed, many of the barriers that have been experienced by our partners have also presented challenges for ourselves.
- **Keeping track:** Not everyone interested in this funding will have attended the workshop we convened. Moreover, organisations in other LEPs are also applying for Priority 4 funding and organisations in GBSLEP will also be applying for funding against other priorities, both of which may result in some overlap and missed projects. There are many opportunities for organisations to work together to develop larger, better connected projects rather than individually applying for similar projects in isolation. There is also potential for cross-LEP working if we are aware of projects going on in other LEPs that may be similar. Part of our role is to keep abreast of these projects to help join them up, but it is a constant challenge. The development of a low carbon project pipeline has begun to help make this easier.

The Outcome

Results

Benefits to GBSLEP and Solihull Council

Given that Priority 4, by DCLG's own admission, is one of the most complex funding streams to access, our involvement as technical assistance partners has helped GBSLEP and the fund managers from Solihull MBC gain a clearer understanding of what projects are being developed that could be funded by ERDF. This knowledge would have been difficult to access without our extensive networks and outreach and we have helped to downsize the huge task of bringing projects out from under the surface and into fruition.

Benefits to the customers

By running the workshop and providing advice, we have given the numerous partners interested in accessing this pot:

- A greater understanding of the eligibility of Priority 4.
- A more extensive knowledge base of other projects going on and concurrent collaboration opportunities.
- A pipeline that we run that partners can tap into to fulfil the above.
- A mechanism to allow dissemination and communication, through our networks, to find more information and advice about this funding.
- Support with developing projects, to ensure that it is compliant and fit for purpose.

Benefits to Sustainability West Midlands

Ultimately, the ERDF Priority 4 funding programme is all about reducing carbon emissions and stimulating the low carbon economy. This fits with many of our [2020 vision priorities](#), including Energy, Buildings, Jobs, Transport and Procurement, but also our key targets to help us achieve this vision, including:



- *“The West Midlands is a hub for low-carbon technology innovation and an international supplier, increasing productivity by 30%.*
- *There has been growth in the building refurbishment industry and the manufacture of wind turbines, fuel cells and fittings.*
- *Investment in the motor industry has taken advantage of the ‘green motoring’ market.*
- *Up-skilling programmes have equipped the local workforce with skills to enter new job markets.*
- *Many communities and businesses own micro-generation facilities to produce their own energy.”*

Another clear benefit to us is that we are now maintaining a low carbon project pipeline. This was developed on the back of this technical assistance role, but has since been expanded to include projects going on in the other five LEAs in the West Midlands that may or may not be relevant for ERDF funding. There are currently over 40 projects in the pipeline.

In the Future

We hope to continue providing technical assistance support to GBSLEP in similar ways and working with them to ensure that the low carbon element of ERDF funding is appropriately accessed to help us achieve our vision’s objectives outlined above. We will also continue to monitor and update the low carbon project pipeline.

The Extra’s

Accolades

“Very interesting session for a newcomer to West Midlands ERDF” – attendee at our workshop.

Links and Downloads

[Outputs from the Priority 4 project identification workshop](#)

[Government information on ERDF](#)

Contact Details

For further information on our work with the LEPs or to work with us in one of a variety of ways, please contact the SWM team on 0121 237 5890 or enquiries@swm.org.uk.