

# **Suggested set up of LENS**

## **Introduction**

The Irish Environmental Network (IEN) is working facilitate Local Environmental Networks (LENs) throughout Ireland in their work. The IEN wishes to see a thriving LEN in every county/local authority district, and will work within our capacity to help each group reach their full potential.

We would like to facilitate the creation of a local network that functions at it's best, that is fun and rewarding to be a part of, and that can fit into a national picture, such as being able to collaborate with bordering counties on projects, or being able to easily feed into council decisions through the Public Participation Networks.

The IEN does not intend to impose an agenda upon local groups, or take over from the work they are doing. Rather, we would like to help us all to efficiently pool our resources and knowledge in order for us all to help each other in our common goals.

The IEN envisions that each LEN will have the following aspects. These are the only 'must haves' that the IEN would suggest for an LEN:

- Be an inclusive group, open for any individual to join.
- Be a member of their local Public Participation Network.
- Work to put in place an effective communication system. (The IEN is working on a communications platform to enable all LENs to communicate, and also to exchange information with the IEN.)

## **LEN Vision Statement**

Local Environmental Networks connect individuals, empower them to get involved in climate action and make a positive change for the future of their community.

## **Guidelines for setting up a Local Environmental Network**

The purpose of an LEN is to connect all people in a given county who share an interest in environmental and sustainability issues. The LEN will act as a hub or umbrella group to connect individuals, allow them to communicate and collaborate, and build a community around climate action.

An LEN can go by other names, such as a Climate Action Network. For the purpose of this document they will be referred to as Local Environmental Networks, or LENS.

### Guidelines for best practice for LENS:

Each LEN will foster climate dialogue within communities. This will be achieved through raising awareness of the group, and through raising awareness of the issues that they are choosing to focus on. They can do this through their actions as mentioned below.

LENs will be inclusive, and open to any individual to join. In this way, they allow everyone to share in hosting climate activities and learn best practice from the knowledge within the group.

LENs offer those involved two ways to take action; through bottom up local grassroots initiatives, and through top down change in the County Council.

#### 1.Grassroots action

LENs should be kept positive and action focused.

It is recommended that each LEN meet to discuss what local issues are important to them, and create a long term goal to work towards. For example; single-use-plastic free county, a cleaner greener city, farming for change. This can be used as a structure for the years actions. Each event or action that the LEN plans can then be themed towards reaching this long term goal.

How to complete actions and create events with as little stress and as most enjoyment as possible:

For each action, it is recommended that one person is assigned as that action's co-ordinator. This person is responsible for keeping track of the progress of the event, and for following up with those who have volunteered to help. The co-ordinator should be passionate about seeing the event take place, and would usually be the person who proposed the action.

Good communication is essential. (See 'Communications' below.) If you want to get things done quickly, there should be communication on actions between meetings. Use the communication tools you have to keep in touch with those who said they would help, and keep others in the loop also. At each meeting, run through the planned actions and have each co-ordinator provide an update on the work.

## 2. Top down change

Effective input into council decisions is available to all LEN members through their local Public Participation Network (PPN). Each LEN should be a member of their PPN.

When you join up you will receive regular information from your PPN with news from other groups, events, public consultations and PPN committee vacancies. LENs should forward noteworthy information to their members. Vacancies available to environmental representatives should be emailed to members directly.

There are various ways for LEN members to give their input into the PPN:

- Linkage Groups
- Talking to environmental reps on SPCs and Secretariats
- Going to Wellbeing Statement meetings

The PPNs are a valuable resource to be a part of. They can provide networking across sectors, allowing your group to expand the conversation to those who are not usually included. This can be done by promoting your events and projects through the PPN to the other members, and also by hearing of events from others which you may be interested in attending.

The PPN can also provide your group with other resources, such as meeting rooms, or funding to host events. Talk to your local PPN Resource Worker to discover the possibilities available in your district.

The PPN also offers information, keeping you up to date on events in the area, council plans, public submissions, funding opportunities and more.

### **Documenting your actions**

Documenting your actions of both grassroots and policy change, whether through photographs, video or text, and sharing this with the public will mark your LEN as a group that gets things done. This will encourage more to join in, and spread awareness of your group and its actions.

### **Creating a working network**

Each LEN aims to be an effective network that individuals can get involved with. Many of the individuals who take part in your work will also be a member of other groups and organisations, and can share the knowledge learned here with the LEN.

The LEN should have a system in place that allows easy communication between individuals and existing groups.

As a network, it is important for each LEN to focus on fostering connections between individuals and including established groups.

Each LEN should have an official email address that can be used to contact the group directly. This should not be a personal email address, but rather one that can be easily taken over by someone should the existing person in charge of communications retire from the position.

See the 'Suggested LEN Internal Communications' document for more information on creating an effective network.

## **Membership**

Membership to the LEN should be open for all individuals.

It is suggested that membership is free, and that joining the Network is made as simple as possible.

It is also recommended that types of membership be kept to a minimum, as it will keep admin and organisation as simple as possible. For example, everyone who has given their email address to receive the newsletter could be counted as a member.

When a new member is signing up, it is a good opportunity to take this moment to ask them questions that will help you organise networking and knowledge sharing. (See 'Suggested LEN Internal Communications' for ideas on gathering pertinent information from members upon sign up.)

An LEN is not intended for groups to join, rather is a network of individuals. These individuals may still be members of other groups, but may not wish to, or be able to speak for that group. However, the knowledge that these individuals can share as part of their other group, the contacts that they have through their other work, can all help to boost the message of their group and the LEN.

For example, an event could be co-hosted by the LEN and a group that an individual is a member of, using the contacts in the LEN to reach more people, and the knowledge of the group to share knowledge of a particular issue or message.