What are Local Enterprise Partnerships?

Local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) are partnerships between local authorities, businesses and local stakeholders which were created to set the investment priorities for their local area to support growth, create new jobs and businesses.

There are 39 LEPs, incorporating 24 ‘Enterprise Zones’ across England, which are geographic areas where the aim is to support growth, create new jobs and businesses.

LEPs come in different sizes and structures – some have special interest groups or advisory panels, and the make-up of their Boards differs in terms of membership including the balance between public, private-sector and representatives from wider stakeholders such as higher education/Universities and voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. Some LEPs are actively engaged with their local voluntary and community sector (VCS) and others aren’t.

LEPs were originally created as private sector-led partnerships between the public and private sectors, replacing the abolished regional development agencies in 2012. Their scope has since widened with the inclusion of developing investment strategies for European Structural Funds. These funds amount to over €6bn, to be allocated between 2014 and 2020, and £2.6bn from the Regional Growth Fund\(^1\) up until 2016. A further £10billion, over five years, is to be made available through the Single Local Growth Fund, designed to invest in skills, housing and transport up to 2020.

Under EU funding proposals, at least 20% of this allocation should be spent on social inclusion projects, helping those facing multiple disadvantages. Consequently, the role of LEPs has expanded into areas such as:

- Skills for employment
- Community-led local development

\(^1\) Further information about the Regional Growth Fund can be found at https://www.gov.uk/understanding-the-regional-growth-fund
NCVO’s European Funding Network has published a list of LEPs alongside links to each of their strategies, which is up to date as at April 2014. It provides a good but not exhaustive overview of their priorities: [http://europeanfundingnetwork.eu/news/how-leps-are-engaging-with-the-sector](http://europeanfundingnetwork.eu/news/how-leps-are-engaging-with-the-sector). The website also contains a good overview of what the funding allocations are to each LEP area, and how your organisation can have a say.

How voluntary and community organisations can engage with LEPs

As LEPs can be business-led, entrepreneur-led or local authority-led, some LEP Boards (or individual representatives) may not be aware of what voluntary sector organisations or social enterprises can offer. However, many of the strategic priorities for which they are responsible will have an impact on the work of VCS organisations or on the people and places that VCS organisations support.

It is therefore vitally important that the VCS makes a coordinated, joined-up offer to LEPs, clearly demonstrating the importance of their role in providing access to individuals facing multiple disadvantages, generate innovative solutions and deliver vital services that can help LEPs to achieve their goals.

Guidance for LEPs, issued by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), and the European Commission, outlines that they should engage with the voluntary and community sector locally in order to determine the priorities and strategy for their local funding allocation. BIS also recognises the potential advantages social enterprises can offer LEPs² as a key partner for building relationships with a LEP Board.

An important first step is researching your local LEP – familiarise yourself with its representatives and what local priorities and strategies have been set. You can find information and contact details for your local LEP on the LEP network website: [www.lepnetwork.net](http://www.lepnetwork.net).

Understanding the level of engagement your LEP already has with your local VCS is also useful. For example, is there representation on the Board from a Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) or other local voluntary sector support agency? What other voluntary organisations are working with the LEP, sitting on its board or being commissioned by the LEP – if any? It may be worthwhile contacting your CVS and enquiring about their involvement.

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Almost all LEPs will have a prominent link on their website outlining their strategic economic plan, and a majority of LEPs across the UK have made their proposed EU Structural and Investment Fund strategies available. This should provide details on how each LEP wants to spend their allocation of EU funds and which priorities and opt-ins they are interested in exploring.

Points to note:

- LEPs are still very under-resourced so engagement or responses to enquiries can sometimes be limited.
- LEPs do not distinguish organisations by ‘profit’ or ‘non-profit’ sector so communicate in terms of what you can offer in terms of delivery - creating an environment for local job growth, building skills, business development. But also inform about the sector’s collective workforce, asset base and the impact you can have on local supply chains.

Why should LEPs sign up to a local Compact?

Most local authorities are signed up to a local Compact, and it is discretionary for partnership bodies such as LEPs to do so. However, there are direct benefits for LEPs, the local VCS and the local community if they choose to do so.

Local Compact working groups should be actively engaging with Local Enterprise Partnerships, encouraging them to sign up to - and get involved in - their local Compact. Signing up sends out a strong signal that LEPs are committed to working in partnership with local voluntary and community organisations for the benefit of local communities.

Importantly, signing up to a local Compact can provide a key way for LEPs to access individuals who are furthest from the labour market and achieve key social inclusion outcomes. The local voluntary sector often has unique access to marginalised members of society – local Compacts allow LEPs to take a coordinated approach to working with the voluntary sector, and subsequently, to reaching these groups.

Local Compacts go beyond being merely a list of activities for each partner to undertake – they signify a spirit of collaboration and an approach which people can understand and respond to without ever needing to read a case study or action plan. LEPs shouldn’t be fearful of signing up to a local Compact – if they provide a space for good partnership working, then why not sign up to it?

Finally, partnerships in your area might be working well now, but how can you be sure they will always be this good? A Compact way of working is about not only doing things the right way, but committing to continue doing so. It is a way of showing to other partners that commissioners will take a collaborative approach to working together, and can be trusted.
Further information

- **KnowHow NonProfit** – How to get your head around Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs):
  http://knowhownonprofit.org/how-to/how-to-get-your-head-around-local-enterprise-partnerships-leps
- **Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)** – Map of Local Enterprise Partnerships:
  https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-enterprise-partnerships-map
- **Department for Communities and Local Government and BIS** - Supporting economic growth through local enterprise partnerships and enterprise zones:
- **House of Commons** – LEPs Briefing Paper:
  www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05651.pdf
- **NCVO** – European Funding Network:
- **NCVO** – European Funding Network – List of LEPs and their involvement with the VCS (as of April 2014):
- **One East Midlands** – LEPs and their role in the 2014-20 EU Funding Programme – Policy Briefing:
  https://www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/sites/default/files/library/LEP%20briefing%20revised%20July%202013_0.pdf#overlay-context=oneemleppolicybriefing (Last updated July 2013)
- **LEP Network**: www.lepnetwork.net
- **Regional Voices** – Local Enterprise Partnership Engagement Project:
  www.regionalvoices.org/LEPS

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