**Background**

Meath Partnership, on behalf of the Meath Local Action Group, invites Expressions of Interest from owners and proprietors of historic country homes and gardens across County Meath as part of a targeted time-limited call for proposals under the LEADER Programme 2014 – 2020 titled “Unlocking the Potential of Meath’s Historic Country Homes and Gardens”.

This targeted call for Expressions of Interest (EOIs) is being issued under the ‘Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation’ theme of the LEADER Programme with a specific focus on driving the integration and enhancement of Meath’s unique combination of historical and contemporary tourist offerings.

The importance of tourism as a source of sustainable economic life in rural Ireland is widely acknowledged and understood, and locations that offer distinctive and marketable tourist attractions and offerings have the opportunity of generating and developing a sustainable and employment-intense source of indigenous economic activity deeply embedded in the rural economy and community. The built, historic and cultural tourism assets and attractions Meath is bestowed with provide it with a unique platform to realise such opportunity.

The call involves a competitive process which is intended to specifically target individual historic country home owners and proprietors and will support projects aimed at increasing the number of homes and gardens open to the public or projects which aim to enhance and upgrade existing properties currently open to the public. Support is conditional on the permanency of the offering and public access timeframe.

For more information on the relevant LEADER Programme Theme, please visit Meath Partnership’s website at: <http://www.meathpartnership.ie/pages/rural_development/>

**Objective of Unlocking the Potential of Meath’s Historic Country Homes and Gardens Call 2017**

This offer of LEADER grant aid to owners and proprietors of Meath’s historic county homes aims to support the opening of these homes and gardens to national and international tourism, support local employment opportunities, improve the long-term sustainability of these properties and offer an exciting new dimension to *‘destination Meath’* that will appeal to a wide range of visitors particularly sightseers and the cultural interest market.

**Submitting your Expression of Interest**

Expression of Interests must be submitted on the prescribed form which is available for completion or download on Meath Partnership’s website [www.meathpartnership.ie](http://www.meathpartnership.ie) or alternatively it can be requested directly from Meath Partnership by contacting us on 046 - 9280790.

It is important also to be aware that both the applicants and the subject of the application for aid must be deemed eligible to receive financial assistance in accordance with the Operating Rules of the LEADER Programme and the objectives of the Local Development Strategy for Co. Meath. Eligibility in this context will be assessed against the information provided in the Expression of Interest document.

**What Can Be Funded?**

In general the provision of financial assistance can be considered where the proposal being put forward is consistent with the objectives of the LEADER Local Development Strategy and where the specific development for which support is being sought has been identified within the Strategy as being eligible for support. In this context the following can be considered as examples of eligible developments:

* External demesne development and improvements;
* Internal visitor facilities and accommodation of visitor streams;
* Restoration of historical, internal and external features;
* Accommodation for visitors including function facilities;
* Interpretation of historical aspects and historical document viewing;
* Walled garden restoration and development;
* Provision of outdoor activities and walks;
* Technical, archaeological and engineering services; and
* Access, egress and visitor management facilities.

**Phase 1: Call for Expressions of Interest**

In this phase, intending applicants are invited to submit a completed and signed Expression of Interest form. The deadline for receipt of all EOIs is **Wednesday, 22nd February 2017**. Late applications will not be considered, without exception.

Once this deadline has expired, Meath Partnership will assess all EOIs received against the prescribed scoring criteria and shortlist those EOIs that are eligible for consideration for support in accordance with said criteria. Meath Partnership will notify **all** applicants of the outcome of the ‘Unlocking the Potential of Meath’s Historic Country Homes and Gardens’ Call for EOIs in writing by Monday, 06th March 2017. A rationale for all decisions will be communicated to all applicants subject to arrangements with the Meath Local Action Group.

**Phase 2: Submission of Applications for Grant Aid**

All shortlisted EOIs will be then issued with an application pack in the week commencing 13th March 2017 and will be invited to attend an Information Seminar in early March 2017. Further details of this event will be provided in due course. The closing date for receipt of a fully completed application form will be **Monday, 14th August 2017** no later than 4pm.

It is anticipated that all applications for funding submitted in Phase 2 of the Call will be evaluated and assessed for funding in September 2017 with offers of grant aid to successful applicants due to issue in October 2017.

**Budget for Call**

The overall available budget for the 2017 *‘Rejuvenating Meath’s Historic Country Homes and Gardens’* call is set at €200,000.00. The minimum grant requirement which will be considered for support is €5,000.00; the maximum grant available under this call is set at €75,000.00. In some cases the Meath LAG may choose to award a level of grant aid to your project less than that which you had applied for. Awards generally will take into account the need to ensure the sustainability of the project which is a priority requirement. All EOIs received will be reviewed and evaluated in respect of the eligibility of the proposal and the eligibility of the promoter:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Eligibility Assessment – Expressions of Interest** | **Pass/Fail** |
| Eligibility of the Promoter |  |
| Eligibility of the Proposal |  |
| **Selection and Award Criteria – Project Application** | **Weighting** |
| Capacity of the project to attract local, national and international visitors |  |
| Quality, permanency and sustainability of project offering |  |
| The capacity, experience and resources of the applicant body/individual |  |
| The merits of the home and garden in meeting Historic Country Homes requirements |  |
| The extent to which the project addresses the aims and objectives of the Meath Local Development Strategy |  |

EOI’s must meet the Pass/Fail criteria in order to progress to Application Stage (Phase 2). The final determination on the award of LEADER funding in respect of your application will be made by the Meath Local Action Group.

**Closing Date for the Submission of Expression of Interest**

The closing date for the receipt of fully completed expressions of interest is **Wednesday, 22nd February 2017**. Late applications will not be considered. All expressions of interest should be submitted in hard copy, must contain original signatures and be accompanied by a completed Data Protection Disclaimer. Please return all Expressions of Interest to:

Meath Partnership
Call for Proposals – Unlocking the Potential of Meath’s Historic Country Homes and Gardens
Unit 7, Kells Business Park,
Cavan Road,
Kells,
Co. Meath