

SLAED

Scottish Local Authorities
Economic Development Group



Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development Group Communications Plan

Providing a national voice for local economic development

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Introduction and Background

The Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development (SLAED) Group is the professional network for economic development officers from across Scotland's 32 local authorities.

SLAED exists to provide an effective forum for representing, supporting, promoting and further developing the vital role played by local authorities as a collective in contributing to the development of Scotland's economy. It does this by reflecting the work of the 32 local authorities and providing a national voice for local economic development. Collectively local authorities play an important role in providing economic leadership and acting as a key link across government (local and national), businesses and knowledge institutions.

This Communications Plan has been developed via engagement of SLAED members through a series of workshops held in late 2019, and its purpose is to enhance and formalise SLAED communications, both within the network and with external stakeholders. These include local, regional and national partners.

SLAED Structure

SLAED's work is carried out by its network of Strategic and Thematic Groups, which report into the overarching Executive Group. The Strategic Groups comprise of People, Place, and Business, and the Thematic Groups focus on EU Funding, Performance, Rural and Tourism. Whilst each group has its own individual communication processes, there is a recognised need to embed strong processes for two-way communication between groups and with the Executive, as well as with the wider membership. The Executive Group comprises the Chairs of each sub-group and provides strategic oversight and direction. It is therefore advised that communications becomes a standing item on the agenda of the Executive and all sub groups.

SLAED Group Structure



Communication Objectives

The key objectives of SLAED's Communication Plan are:

1. Develop and promote the role of local authorities as lead partners for local economic development and articulate the significant contribution they make to Scotland's economy - locally, regionally and nationally.
2. Develop dynamic forums for SLAED members to work collaboratively on common issues, share information and expertise, and encourage best practice, innovation and continuous improvement.
3. Increase levels of active participation in the network through two-way communications, increased participation in workshops and events and providing a range of effective channels for information sharing within the network.
4. Analyse and report on the contribution made by local authorities to economic development via the annual SLAED Indicators Framework.
5. Represent local authority economic development interests in national discussions and influence key decisions that impact on Scotland's economic development network, helping to lead the agenda through proactive engagement with national government.
6. Engage effectively with other local government professional groupings to maximise collective impact and ensure a joined-up, holistic approach to communications across local government.

Communication Channels

SLAED members were asked to prioritise their preferred and most effective channels of communication at the workshops. The discussion encompassed a wide range of options and reflected a variety of member priorities. Nevertheless, members agreed six complementary communication channels would be most effective in taking forward the Strategic Plan 2019-22 and in generally improving overall SLAED communications. These are detailed below.

To support the introduction of the Communications Strategy, the full SLAED mailing list has been reviewed and updated with the aim of being able to reach a much larger proportion of local authority economic development officers across Scotland. The Head of Economic Development at each council was contacted and asked to confirm contact details for everyone in their team. This process will be carried out on an annual basis to ensure the list remains up to date. In addition, individual council economic development staff can engage directly with SLAED via a range of mechanisms, including the SLAED website, newsletters and K-Hub group.

It is important that communications are two-way, therefore in addition to information being shared by SLAED to members, members are also responsible for feeding information back into the wider network. This process will be encapsulated within a 'Members' Agreement', which will be a short document setting out the benefits of SLAED to member authorities, as well as expectations regarding what is needed from councils to ensure SLAED is as effective as possible.

The following six key communication channels were prioritised by SLAED members and will be taken forward through implementation of this Communications Plan.

1. Member Events and Workshops

These will be aimed at increasing active participation and will be focused on key priorities and topical issues for local government economic development. These will have clear benefits and outputs for participating members and will seek to get colleagues more actively involved in the network and contributing to the work of SLAED / council economic development. 'Save the Date' details will be issued well in advance of events and workshops to encourage maximum participation and follow up communications will be issued to ensure continuing momentum.

Events and workshops will be arranged as required, where a priority is identified via the SLAED Executive or any of the sub-groups. In addition to the regular schedule of Executive and sub-group meetings, there will also be increased opportunities for the full membership to come together to network and progress key issues (including the Annual Conference and the AGM). These will be open to anyone working in local government economic development and will focus on agreed shared priority areas. A draft schedule of meetings will be shared at the beginning of the year and all members are invited to put forward proposals for topics that SLAED should be addressing and the format that meetings should take.

2. Email

In addition to introducing more interactive and engaging communication channels, members also prioritised continuing regular email communications as the most straightforward and least time-consuming method. These are direct emails from the SLAED network to individual members, either through the main distribution list or the mailing lists for individual sub-groups. General updates and information sharing is generated via the Improvement Service as part of

the secretariat service, and more focused communications are shared via Executive members or Chairs of individual sub-groups.

The content of email communications is wide-ranging, and general communications should be of potential relevance / interest to all SLAED members. Individual Group Chairs will be responsible for generating, sourcing and sharing email content relevant to their individual sub-group networks.

3. Knowledge Hub

The SLAED Knowledge Hub Group will continue to be used, with increased emphasis on maintaining and updating content. This will include encouraging SLAED members to engage with the K-Hub group, share content, etc. A more structured system for naming documents will be put in place to allow members to identify more easily the content relevant to them and where to access it. The SLAED Knowledge Hub group is restricted to individuals working within local authority economic development, therefore all content shared on this platform cannot be viewed or accessed by non-members. The Knowledge Hub 'forum' feature can be used to instigate and participate in discussions, promote events, post content and access information. All relevant information will also be shared via the 'library' feature.

Members have previously expressed concerns in terms of being unable to access the K-Hub system or being unsure of how to use it. Comprehensive user guides will therefore be shared to address this, with further support available via the Improvement Service's Knowledge Management team (km@improvementservice.org.uk).

4. SLAED Website

The information on the SLAED website requires to be updated on a more regular basis and members are responsible for providing up to date content. Relevant SLAED information is also featured on the Improvement Service website and this is maintained internally by IS staff. Information on the website is accessible by external stakeholders, which limits what can be shared via this medium. However, this is a key platform for sharing details of events, publications and contact details for further information. It can also be used for signposting to other relevant content. The website will be reviewed on a bi-monthly basis.

5. Newsletter

Regular member newsletters have been identified as a key priority and will be introduced from 2020. The Improvement Service will design and issue these on a quarterly basis, but the viability will be dependent on SLAED members providing relevant content and regular updates from sub-groups. There will be scope to amend timescales as this progresses. Content of newsletters will include information on upcoming events and webinars, updates from the Executive and sub-groups, links to relevant external content and details of publications.

Newsletters will be created on the MailChimp platform which will allow for templates to be created quickly and easily, saving significant time on the design process. Support for this will be provided by the Improvement Service's Knowledge Management team. Additional benefits of using MailChimp include being able to check the number of people who have read a newsletter, how many people have clicked on links, which content was most popular, etc.

6. Webinars

Webinars will be prioritised going forward as a means of sharing information across the

network, particularly where members are unable to travel long distances to attend face to face events. Where relevant, webinar topics can also be made available to external audiences. Webinars will be considered when an issue is identified as requiring discussion by SLAED members. This will provide a wide range of benefits including cutting down on travel time and costs, reaching much wider audiences and attracting interesting and innovative speakers.

Regular webinars on emerging priorities and topical issues will be particularly beneficial for members in remote and /or rural locations who find it challenging to engage with SLAED events that are typically held in the central belt. However, there will also be benefits for all members in terms of enhanced information sharing. Webinars can be recorded and will be shared via the Knowledge Hub and other relevant communication channels for future reference. (i.e. you do not necessarily need to tune into a webinar as it is taking place; rather it can be accessed at a suitable later date). Developing a suite of webinars on key topics of interest to council economic development colleagues will also help SLAED to deliver added value for its members. Webinars will be supported by the Improvement Service's Knowledge Management team initially, with the aim of developing members' own capabilities in designing and hosting these going forward.

Additional Activity

Active Participation

In addition to developing and embedding more comprehensive and effective communication channels, there will also be a drive to encourage more active participation of individuals within the network. All 32 local authorities are already members of SLAED, but active participation could be encouraged in a range of areas, such as engagement in individual groups, a wider range of local authorities inputting into SLAED consultation responses and better feedback being disseminated from individuals attending meetings on behalf of SLAED.

Increased participation and succession planning is needed within the SLAED Executive, and the SLAED Executive will contact individual Heads of Economic Development and relevant SOLACE leads to seek volunteers to play an active role in helping lead, develop and contribute to the work of SLAED. There are opportunities for individuals to take on roles on the Executive, lead sub-groups and help to raise the profile of SLAED within their teams and with wider stakeholders. Any individual taking on a role on the SLAED Executive would have significant support, both from existing Executive members and through the secretariat service provided by the Improvement Service.

Performance Reporting

One of SLAED's key outputs is the annual SLAED Indicators Report, which demonstrates the significant contribution local government makes to local, regional and national economic outcomes. It combines a range of data submitted by each local authority, as well as information taken from publicly available sources to demonstrate local government's commitment to continuous improvement and transparency in economic development delivery.

The SLAED Indicators Report has been published for the last seven financial years and will continue to be a key communication from the SLAED network going forward. It is therefore important to ensure that this is continually reviewed to ensure it continues to provide a relevant and comprehensive overview of local economic development activity.

Promotional Materials

Updated promotional materials were procured in 2019 and these are reflective of the objectives and priorities within the SLAED Strategic Plan 2019-22. Promotional materials include pop-up banners for each of the Groups to take to events where they are representing SLAED. Flyers were also created to be handed out at events, as well as pens featuring the SLAED logo.

Promotional materials will help to raise the profile of SLAED and help project a professional representation of the network at events. They also help to inform a wide range of stakeholders of the structure of SLAED and the key objectives within the Strategic Plan. Promotional materials will be kept under review and updated as required.

Social Media

SLAED members do not have a single preferred social media platform and individual members use a range of different platforms. It was agreed that a SLAED social media presence will not

be prioritised in the short term, but this is something that can be regularly reviewed and taken forward if demand increases. Enhancing communication through the mediums set out above will be prioritised in the first instance.

If SLAED members do want to introduce a social media presence in future, a potential consideration is to re-brand the 'IS Outcomes' Twitter account, which is not currently active, and make it a SLAED account. This would allow for retention of the existing followers of that account, which are directly relevant to SLAED. However, the success or otherwise of a SLAED Twitter account would be dependent on SLAED members taking responsibility for tweeting relevant material and maintaining the presence. Consideration would also need to be given to who is authorised to tweet on behalf of the whole SLAED network and what suitable content would be. A key benefit of a SLAED Twitter account would be to tweet throughout events, similar to other economic development and local government organisations.



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