



Community led EV pilot project and Leitrim Community Car Scheme

 Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim

A six-month pilot project to test how shared mobility can aid in the delivery of electrification of transport targets and supporting communities in net zero carbon initiatives, supported by Leitrim County Council and Leitrim Volunteer Centre (LVC).

The aim of the project is to assess the needs and demands of community and rural EV-sharing initiatives, and to develop electric transport solutions. The project is complementing a recently published Climate Action Plan.

The Leitrim Volunteer Centre will have the use of a new Corsa-e for its daily trips as part of a new community electric vehicle (EV) pilot rolled out by ESB, and supported by Leitrim County Council. Leitrim Volunteer Centre has a volunteer driving scheme in place in Carrick-on-Shannon, Leitrim Community Car Scheme, with 27 volunteers and 40 clients taking trips in their own personal vehicles. The LVC will manage the pilot programme including access to the car.



The six-month pilot also involves the installation of a new charge point at The Hive in Carrick-on-Shannon by Leitrim County Council, with the infrastructure remaining in place after the programme is completed.



Interview Questions and Responses

How did you as a community agree the key objectives that you wanted your project to deliver?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the civil defence authorities had provided essential services for vulnerable people in rural locations. However, there was a gap in provision of service following the pandemic. Therefore, the Leitrim Volunteer Centre (LVC), in partnership with Leitrim County Council and the Department for Rural and Community Development, signed a service level agreement to deliver community support and subsequently launched the Leitrim Community Car Scheme. The Leitrim Volunteer Centre and Leitrim County Council mutually agreed that a service was required urgently.

How did you decide upon a single project idea that could deliver against those objectives?

The biggest need after the COVID-19 pandemic was transport for older people in rural areas. Therefore, the Leitrim Volunteer Centre identified other volunteer car schemes around Ireland as being the potential solution and understood that additional bus services could not access the extreme remote locations.

ESB approached the LVC as part of its X_Incubation programme to take part in the pilot project to gauge usage. The LVC realised that encourage volunteers to use the EV would reduce costs of the Leitrim Community Car Scheme, reducing emissions, whilst reaching those in the community most in need.

Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects. Has that consensus held or does it remain challenged by some in the community? If so, how are you dealing with that?

The consensus for both the EV pilot project and the Leitrim Community Car Scheme was built in partnership. The consensus has held strong and it has not been challenged. There is no local competition to provide the services and they have been very well supported. Subsequently, the LVC have built an expectation now for delivery.



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Rialtas na hÉireann
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How did you approach planning and project management around your selected idea?

Launching a community car scheme was a project the LVC had never done before, therefore their approach to planning and managing the project was new and involved a high amount of research into requirements and ongoing learning.

How has that stood the test of time through the project? Have you had to revise your plans. How have you managed that process?

The plans for the Leitrim Community Car Scheme have evolved over time, with the LVC developing a Code of Practice for drivers, formal role descriptions for advertisement for volunteer drivers, alongside formal health and safety, manual handling and emergency first aid training.

The LVC, with limited staff resources, have undertaken an ongoing learning process and managed this process independently, with some external advice from Leitrim County Council and TFI (Transport for Ireland) local link.

How did you identify a funding need?

Funding is the most critical need for the Leitrim Community Car Scheme, as the LVC pay drivers expenses and mileage expenses, which can be very high if volunteers are driving 200 miles for an appointment. In the first year of operation (2022/23), the LCCS cost €17,000, operating at a €13,000 loss. The LVC does receive community donations and received a small grant from mPower, a digital hub delivering a local day care service.

The EV pilot project is being funded externally by ESB and the LVC were approached directly. The LVC were not actively seeking to obtain funding to launch an EV scheme.

How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

The process for bidding for funding is undertaken by Josephine Stroker, the Manager of the LVC. She is always looking for funds and lobbying local and national government. Josephine finds the bidding process for government money time consuming, with applications now more complex and requiring more reporting afterwards.

Did you have a need for specialist expertise for your project? If so how did you handle that and approach experts?

The external expertise has been obtained from ESB who approached the LVC directly to launch the pilot project. The LVC meet ESB, an external contracting organisation and Leitrim County Council to manage the project and share learnings.

What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome and how did you overcome them?

The biggest challenge is funding for the Leitrim Community Car Scheme. LVC launched a 'gofundme' page to meet the initial €4000 shortfall. There was initially around €1,200 in donations, but it requires more promotions which requires human resource.

Another key challenge is managing expectations of the wider community. For example, the volunteers cannot directly deal with medical emergencies and only undertake transport activities.

A final challenge is the time requirement for volunteers. An online web page using IVOL system was used to recruit volunteers and proved successful, growing from 3-5 volunteers initially to 30 volunteers.

Has the community managed to stay true to the original project vision? If not, why not? If it has, how has this been achieved?

Both the Leitrim Community Car Scheme and EV pilot project have stayed to their original vision of providing much needed services for vulnerable people in very remote communities.

What have been the biggest learnings from the delivery of your project?

Accessing rural locations can be challenging for public buses and therefore low carbon community car schemes are important for supporting vulnerable people in rural Ireland.

Overall, through delivering the project, the LVC have gradually become local leaders in delivering the scheme. However, costs and human resource requirements are the biggest challenges and therefore learnings for others to consider in the early stages of project delivery.

What decisions, or elements of organisation have been the most important in the delivery of your project?

The LVC hired a member of staff, working 11 hours per week to support operations in response to the lack of human resource for delivery.

The LVC took a decision in the early stages of the EV pilot project to meet every week virtually to ensure smooth project management, covering key learnings, key challenges and project changes, and solving problems. This group includes:

- Enterprise, responsible for maintaining the car and for using the app.
- Leitrim County Council representative
- Atlantic Technological University Sligo, who are researching into the EV pilot's operation
- External contracting organisation
- ESB
- Leitrim Volunteer Centre, responsible for operating the EV booking system and training drivers.

What were the most important sources of advice and guidance for your community as you moved through the different phases of the project?

TFI local link (Donegal Sligo Leitrim Office) has been the main source of advice and support. The LVC are now preparing a report and proposal to potentially access operation or funding support from TFI local link.

Key contact

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Links

News article for pilot project: <https://esb.ie/media-centre-news/press-releases/article/2023/03/01/esb-launches-community-ev-pilot-project-in-carrick-on-shannon>

Website: <https://volunteerleitrim.ie/communityev/>