



Portlaoise Enterprise Centre

 Portlaoise, County Laois

Portlaoise Enterprise Centre (PEC) is a not-for-profit company in the community sector which offers a range of facilities to encourage businesses to develop, including:

- Hot desks (low-cost with no long-term lease agreement)
- Co-working
- Small office space
- Industrial units (ground floor with roller shutter door access, located in Portlaoise)
- Training facilities
- A range of amenities such as conference rooms and canteen areas.

The PEC obtained funding from the LEADER programme to expand the building, opening 6 new office spaces and upgrading meeting rooms, enabling new businesses to be based at the centre.



Interview Questions and Responses

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

The Portlaoise Enterprise Centre is designed to support start-ups and growing businesses as its main ethos. Since opening in 2006, it has provided a low-cost space for business and creating long-term partners.

Therefore, internal projects are designed to retain businesses and support them to develop, as a not-for-profit organisation. The main income for the PEC is rental income and the renovation projects at the PEC have been designed to achieve this.

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

It is critical to have safe and financially established businesses in the PEC to support financial stability. Therefore, financial opportunities drive project ideas, and this is the only way to develop projects as a PEC.

The opportunity under the LEADER programme appeared and enabled PEC to add six new small office spaces and upgrade the training and meeting rooms. This allowed the PEC to increase the number of businesses at the PEC.

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 PEC Board is key for gaining consensus around projects and internal objectives. There was no challenge from the community for expanding the PEC.

However, the board are key for approving which businesses are based within the PEC, following a formal application process. Patricia as Centre Manager has direct contact with prospective businesses to ensure the PEC is suitable and to understand their needs.



Funded through the Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund

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

Planning and project managing the expansion project was the responsibility of Patricia, with support from the PEC Board. Although Patricia works part time, the PEC is well established and in operation since 2006 requiring a relatively low amount of resource to manage operations, therefore there is necessary capacity to manage expansion projects.

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

The project management approach was strong for further developing the PEC and the PEC secured additional clients following expansion and upgrades.

There is no further scope to extent and the PEC is focusing upon filling the existing space.

How did you identify a funding need?

The expansion of the PEC required funding from the LEADER programme, including the addition of dividing walls and upgrading internal infrastructure. This funding was identified by continually researching funding opportunities and working with organisations such as Laois County Council.

The PEC also secured further funding via Connected Hubs for energy upgrades including new UPVC windows, EV car charging infrastructure and LED lighting, improving the infrastructure further.

The PEC secured funding via Enterprise Ireland Powering the Regions Enterprise Centre Scheme which provided salary support for securing support for managing the centre and for marketing the PEC.

How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

Patricia, in partnership with the PEC Board wrote the applications to secure the funding, ensuring the story was told well and financial information was accurate.

To support the grant funding via LEADER, the PEC accessed bridging finance from Clann Credo¹ ensure the upgrading of the PEC was completed. However, funding from Enterprise Ireland and Connected Hubs was provided in advance of works.

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

Procuring contractors was managed internally, requiring three quotes for the renovations, whilst asking local businesses and tradespeople to provide quotes.

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

The completion of the three funding applications for the expansion and final reports was challenging in terms of time and associated paperwork. This required using the expertise of the PEC Board and simply providing dedicated resources through Patricia as Centre Manager.

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

The PEC is remaining true to its original vision through the expansion. The PEC is providing initial business support to start-ups and providing the appropriate facilities. If the PEC cannot help, businesses will be signposted to other enterprise centres or the County Laois Local Enterprise Office (LEO).

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

The remote working opportunity is not having a big impact in comparison to how the PEC originally envisaged. Therefore carefully considering the purpose of enterprise centres for the long-term is key.

Sufficient capital investment is required before launching an initial building or expansion project, especially if communities are running a not-for-profit centre and to keeping the prices low.

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

The Board has been critical in the decision making process which has a diverse mix. This includes Laois County Council and business owners who know the challenges and requirements for start-ups and businesses.

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

The Connected Hubs platform offers regular online meetings, networking events and opportunities for building connections. The platform have been key for helping the PEC build a sustainable model and build its client base.

Key contact

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Links

Website: <https://enterprisecentre.ie/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PortlaoiseEnterpriseCentre/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/portlaoiseenter>

LinkedIn: <https://ie.linkedin.com/company/portlaoise-enterprise-centre>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1qImQkYtIgpUh4EK9Y3Wcw>

¹ <https://www.clanncredo.ie/mi-loans-leader-loan-fund#bottom>