

ACORNS

Accelerating the Creation Of
Rural Nascent Start-ups



Providing early stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to meet and even exceed their current aspirations.

***RUNNER UP AT THE EUROPEAN ENTERPRISE PROMOTION AWARDS 2018,
INVESTING IN ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS***



**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



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Those who successfully completed a previous cycle of ACORNS are being offered the opportunity for further support’.

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ACORNS

Early stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, are invited to apply for a place on the ACORNS programme, now in its fifth year.

The intention is to provide up to 50 entrepreneurs with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to meet and even exceed their current aspirations.

The programme will run from October 2019 to April 2020. Selected participants will be those who, on a competitive basis, best demonstrate their potential to advance their businesses and their commitment to fully engage in the initiative.

If you would like to find out more about the initiative or have any questions about ACORNS, please feel free to contact us at info@acorns.ie or phone the office at 01 8450770.

This innovative programme is funded through the **Rural Innovation and Development Fund** by the **Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)**. Thanks to this funding, there will be no charge for those selected to participate in ACORNS and their accommodation costs associated with the residential elements of the initiative will be covered.

WHO QUALIFIES FOR THE PROGRAMME?

ACORNS is designed for nascent female rural entrepreneurs. To qualify for consideration, a woman (i) must have recently set up a new business which she owns or part owns, and which has generated sales no earlier than 1 January 2017 or (ii) must be at an advanced stage of planning a new venture and have a clear idea of what she wants to achieve. If she is not already trading, activities such as organising the start-up team, looking for equipment/facilities, saving money for the start-up, or writing a business plan would all be considered as active commitments to starting a business.

She must also be living in a rural area. These are all areas of the country outside the administrative city boundaries of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

There is no restriction on the sector in which the new business is focused. Favourable consideration will be given to those who expect to grow their business and to employ others over the next three years.

If selected, applicants must be available to attend the first residential session on 14th October/15th October 2019 in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath.

HOW TO APPLY

Please register your interest on the website www.acorns.ie in the first instance and you will be sent an application form by email. Complete the application on your system and return it to us by email attachment.

Application forms can also be sent and received by post. Please contact us on 01 845 0770, if you would like a form posted to you or if you have any difficulties in registering online. **Closing date for receipt of completed applications is the 20th September 2019. No applications received after this date can be considered.**

SELECTION PROCESS

As was the case previously, it is expected that there will be many more applicants than there are places available. Accordingly, it will be a competitive selection process. The ACORNS Lead Entrepreneurs will be central to the selection of successful candidates. They will be seeking those who are prepared to fully engage with the programme; demonstrate a determination to advance their fledging businesses; are prepared to work hard in pursuit of their entrepreneurial goals; and expect to become employers.

There are up to 50 places available for suitable candidates. The ACORNS Lead Entrepreneurs will meet in late September to assess the applications received. Successful candidates will be notified in the following days.

WHAT TIME COMMITMENT IS INVOLVED?

The cycle will start with a residential Developmental Forum, which will get underway in Mullingar on the **14th October / 15th October 2019**. The theme of this Forum is *Establishing Good Foundations*. At this event, the participants will meet each other, their ACORNS Lead Entrepreneur and their round table group for the first time. An overnight stay is incorporated into the event.

Participants will subsequently meet with their ACORNS Lead Entrepreneur and their group of eight peers in separate round tables on four occasions between November and March. These sessions will last for about three hours and will explore the themes of Strategy, Marketing/Sales, Finance, and Implementation. The location of these sessions will be close to the assigned ACORNS Lead. Some travel may be involved on the part of the participants.

A second residential Development Forum will be held on **20th April / 21st April 2020**. The theme of this Forum will be *SMART Planning - The Roadmap Ahead*.

Selected candidates are expected to attend all events.

WHAT'S THE APPROACH?

Based on a belief that entrepreneurs learn best from each other, the ACORNS initiative is focused on interactive round table sessions that are facilitated, not by consultants, academics or professional trainers, but by female entrepreneurs who have started and successfully grown businesses in rural Ireland.

Those who will facilitate the interactive round table meetings and the residential developmental sessions, have the practical knowledge that comes from first-hand experience of owning and managing a successful business in rural Ireland. They believe in the philosophy of *entrepreneurs supporting entrepreneurs* and are giving their time to assist others on a voluntary basis. They are known as ACORNS Lead Entrepreneurs.

Working with a group of about eight participants each, the Lead Entrepreneurs will facilitate round table meetings, addressing enterprise challenges and supporting participants to consider how best to start, develop and position their businesses for sustainability and growth.

LEAD ENTREPRENEURS

The voluntary Lead Entrepreneurs are the backbone of the ACORNS programme. They are not, and cannot be, experts in every area of business but they have faced the challenges of starting and growing a business. All are past participants of the Going for Growth programme and have first-hand experience of the round table peer learning approach and of its benefits. All are entrepreneurs with businesses based in rural Ireland.

ALISON RITCHIE - Polar Ice, Laois

Alison Ritchie is the Managing Director of Polar Ice Ltd., Ireland's leading manufacturer of dry ice products since 1996. Polar Ice is located in Portarlinton, Co Laois. As a serial entrepreneur, Alison established her second business Polar IceTech Ireland Ltd. in 2005, growing the business to become the market leader in Cryogenic Cleaning, and successfully selling the business in 2016.

Alison has a Business Degree from DCU. She subsequently trained and qualified as a Financial Accountant (CPA) and a certified Tax Advisor. Alison was awarded the Ulster Bank Business Achievers Award for Women Led Business in Leinster 2015; named the Women Mean Business Entrepreneur of the Year 2016; awarded Accountant of the Year 2017; and most recently accredited 'Thought Leader - Enterprise Development' at the All Star Business Awards 2018. www.polarice.ie



ANNE CUSACK - Critical Healthcare, Westmeath

Dr Anne Cusack is the cofounder and managing director of Critical Healthcare Limited, offering a comprehensive range of emergency medical products and Software as a Service into Ireland, UK and Europe. Critical Healthcare provides a fully managed service through Medlogistix, an online procurement platform, as well as a range of medical consumables, (Duramedic) and a range of disposable linen, (MediLinen) for the Emergency Services. Critical Healthcare is the only Irish company to be listed on the NHS Framework Agreement for medical consumables by the NHS Ambulance Procurement Group. They are also the Single Managed Service Provider for all medical consumables to Falck (the largest Emergency Services provider globally) in Denmark, Germany, UK and Spain, supplying product to over 3,000 ambulances through Medlogistix. Critical Healthcare employs 22 people in Ireland, and has an office in Germany. www.criticalhealthcare.com



ANNE REILLY - PaycheckPlus, Louth

PaycheckPlus was founded by Anne Reilly in 2005. Head quartered in Drogheda, Co Louth, PaycheckPlus provides Irish and UK Payroll outsourced processing services to clients across a range of sectors. The emphasis of the Payroll Team is to help employers structure their payroll in the most efficient and cost efficient way while ensuring legislative and compliance requirements in a timely and accurate manner. PaycheckPlus is the recipient of a number of awards including The Global Payroll Provider of the Year 2017. Anne is a former lecturer in Irish payroll and a graduate of the Institute of Directors. She sits on a number of Boards and enjoys speaking and sharing her experience in business with aspiring entrepreneurs.

www.paycheckplus.ie



CAROLINE MCENERY - The HR Suite, Kerry

Caroline McEnery set up The HR Suite in response to the demand for an outsourced expert HR department. The company offers specialist tailored and effective human resources and business solutions to over 500 clients throughout Ireland. Caroline is also an adjudicator in the Work Place Commission. The HR Suite is based in Tralee, Co. Kerry, and has an office in Dublin.

Caroline has completed a Masters in Human Resources in the University of Limerick and is a trained mediator. She is also the author of people managers' toolkit 'The Art of Asking the Right Questions' that provides top tips to people managers throughout the employment journey. To mark 10 years in business this year Caroline has launched a children's book 'Celebrating You' to advocate diversity and the importance of celebrating individuality in children. www.thehrrsuiteonline.com



DEIRDRE MCGLONE - Donegal

Deirdre is an outstanding hotelier and businesswoman. Following her graduation from University of Limerick with a degree in European Studies, Deirdre played a pivotal role in the development of the multi-award winning Harvey's Point Hotel, Lough Eske, Donegal. Deirdre is a proud member of the 'Going for Growth' women in business community and a Lead Entrepreneur with ACORNS. She is also a member of the Tourism Leaders Group, set up to help shape government policy to 2025 and a board member of Donegal Tourism. A former 'Donegal Person of the Year', Deirdre is also President of the Donegal Women in Business Network. www.deirdremcglone.com



EIMER HANNON - Hannon Travel, Meath

Eimer Hannon is Managing Director of Hannon Travel, which she founded in 1999. The company has grown to become one of Ireland's leading corporate travel management companies, providing travel services from its two bases in Ireland and Northern Ireland to a large number of both national and international travel accounts. With clients based across Europe, USA and Asia, it services a wide range of business sectors including aviation, finance, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, equestrian, engineering and mining. Eimer sits on the Irish International Air Transport Association Agency Programme Joint Council and also on the Amadeus Consumer Advisory Board.

Eimer is actively involved in the Going for Growth Community, having completed a cycle of both Going for Growth and Continuing the Momentum. She has a firm commitment to helping others and leads a number of high-profile charity initiatives across Ireland. She also holds the position of President of Navan Lions Club.



MARY B WALSH - Ire Wel Pallets, Wexford

Mary B Walsh is the founder and Managing Director of Ire Wel Pallets Ltd. Established in May 1990, IWP is a pallet and packaging solutions provider, supplying pallets, boxes and crates to its exporting customers. The company's customer base includes organisations in the Medical Devices, Pharmaceutical, Food, Drinks, Electronics and Engineering industries. Based near Gorey, Co. Wexford, IWP operates from the first purpose-built pallet manufacturing facility in Ireland. The company operates from a state-of-art ventilated storage facility for Kiln Dried Timber Pallets, in addition to the production facilities on-site. A 2015 investment of €1.5m, an additional €1m in 2017 with a further €2m in 2019 have introduced new technology on site that has given the company more control over its production, quality and stock. With customers nationwide, the experienced and skilled IWP team are now exploring export markets, including the UK. IWP currently employs 50 staff in Gorey and are continuing expansion plans for the business. www.iwppallets.com



TRIONA MAC GIOLLA RÍ - Aró Digital, Galway

Triona Mac Giolla Rí is the co-founder and director of Aró Digital Strategy, a digital agency specialised in maximising direct bookings for hotels. With over 20 years of experience in the hospitality sector, Aró is recognised as one of the leading full-service providers for independent luxury properties. Aró offers website design, technology solutions and marketing strategy to over 200 luxury hotels in Ireland, the UK and all around the world. Providing hotels with a roadmap to grow their direct bookings, Aró delivers cutting edge strategies across the three key areas of customer acquisition, engagement and conversion. Aró Digital Strategy currently employs 30 people in Na Forbacha in the Connemara Gaeltacht.

Triona took part in the 6th Cycle of Going for Growth in 2014 and is a member of the Going for Growth community. www.aro.ie



MONICA FLOOD - Lead Entrepreneur ACORNS Plus

Monica Flood established an IT training and consultancy business in 1981. Olas has developed as one of the premier IT training companies in Ireland and is the sole appointed education partner for SAP. Monica completed the sale of Olas to a French public company, Assima plc. and has retired from the position of CEO to pursue other business and investment interests. Monica's experience of building a service business and a loyal customer base in a very competitive market provides an important perspective for growth and success. A great supporter of the arts in Ireland, Monica is a Patron of The Model in Sligo, home of the Niland Collection and one of Ireland's leading contemporary arts centres. Monica has recently been appointed as a non-executive Director to the Projects Arts Centre, which began in 1966 as a small artist led collective and is now evolving into Ireland's national centre for the contemporary arts.



PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS

ACORNS is now in its 5th year. There is a clear desire on the part of those who previously completed an ACORNS cycle to stay connected with the initiative and to participate in a further development phase. Thanks to the funding being provided through the Rural Innovation and Development Fund by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, past participants of ACORNS are offered the opportunity to participate in a further development phase and to join the ACORNS Community. This helps ensure that they continue to reap the benefits of the programme and of the valuable connections they have made through broadening their support network.



ACORNS 4 participants left to right: Kay Lyng, K Kajoux Jewels; Deirdre Doyle, The Cool Food School; Triona Spellman, Darcybow; Mary B Walsh, Lead Entrepreneur; Aisling McElwain, Aisling McElwain Ceramics; Vicki O'Donnell, Wilder Wander; Anna Dobson, Love Mo Chuisle.



Sile Headen, Machado Men's Grooming, Portlaoise, Co Laois, pictured at the ACORNS Showcase earlier this year.

The Further Development phase is offered to participants in the year after their initial ACORNS cycle and includes:

- Two round table sessions with their ACORNS Lead Entrepreneur,
- An opportunity to attend topic based workshops relevant to their development,
- Further networking opportunities,
- Development of individual participant profiles,
- Tracking of progress against agreed goals and milestones.

Former participants are also invited to continue to avail of ACORNS support through the ACORNS Community, through which they can attend a variety of topic-based workshops over a six-month period and take part in the annual ACORNS Forum and networking event. Those that have already completed a Further Development phase and who wish to strongly drive growth in their business, can also apply to participate in ACORNS Plus, a growth-focussed round table initiative.

PROGRESS MADE BY PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS

Over 200 female entrepreneurs have taken part in ACORNS to date and progress made by previous participants demonstrates encouraging outcomes. Many report increased sales, exports and job creation and continue to grow their businesses.

'The support, motivation and energy from the group I participated on was electric. I recommend ACORNS to every ambitious female entrepreneur I meet. I also networked beyond and outside my group and have engaged in wonderful collaborations with some of the women I have met'.

NIAMH HOGAN, HOLOS SKINCARE



ACORNS NATIONAL FORUM AND SHOWCASE

In April, the annual ACORNS National Forum takes place. This event includes a variety of elements designed to boost motivation and provide an opportunity for structured networking and engagement. All members of the ACORNS community, as well as those who have completed the latest cycle, are invited to attend. A highlight is the ACORNS Showcase where those interested can apply to display their products and services, giving a flavour of the rich diversity of the new businesses being set up by rural female entrepreneurs from across the country.

'ACORNS has given me the confidence to drive my business towards growth. We have tripled our sales and have a strong team that we now feel prepared to manage. The programme has given me structure and a better 'helicopter view' of my business'.

ARANTXA LÓPEZ, ID TRANSLATION



WHO WE ARE

FITZSIMONS CONSULTING

Fitzsimons Consulting specialises in areas related to entrepreneurship and growth. Paula Fitzsimons, founder and managing director of Fitzsimons Consulting, is a recognised expert on entrepreneurship. Paula has been the national coordinator for GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) for Ireland since 2000, is a former President of the consortium of GEM national teams and a former member of the governing body of GERA, the governing body for the Global Entrepreneurship Research Association.

Recognising that fewer women start new businesses and, of those that start, fewer have significant growth ambitions than do men, Paula Fitzsimons designed and developed the Going for Growth initiative, which is focused on peer support as a means of assisting established women entrepreneurs who wish to grow their businesses (www.goingforgrowth.com). Going for Growth, which is funded by Enterprise Ireland and KPMG, has just completed its 11th cycle and has supported over 660 women entrepreneurs to achieve their growth ambitions. Going for Growth was awarded the European Enterprise Promotion Award 2015, Investing in Entrepreneurial Skills, and featured extensively in a book *Inclusive Business Creation – Good Practice Compendium*, published in May 2016 by the OECD and European Commission. Successful past participants of Going for Growth have become voluntary Lead Entrepreneurs on ACORNS.

ACORNS, an initiative for early stage female entrepreneurs, is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (www.acorns.ie). More recently ACORNS was selected to represent Ireland in the European Enterprise Promotion Awards 2018, Investing in Entrepreneurial Skills, and was awarded runner up in this category. ACORNS also featured prominently in the Manifesto for an Innovative Europe, which was developed by the participants of the 2018 SME Assembly.

Back for Business is another initiative developed and implemented by Fitzsimons Consulting to support early stage entrepreneurs among returned Irish emigrants. This programme is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (www.backforbusiness.com).

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO CONTACT US

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SPONSORS

ACORNS is funded through the **Rural Innovation and Development Fund** by the **Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine**. Its objective is to encourage a stronger level of enterprise development in rural areas by seeking out and assisting start-up female entrepreneurs living in rural areas to grow and develop their businesses.

Following a competitive tendering process, the ACORNS initiative developed by Fitzsimons Consulting was selected by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as most suitable to achieve the stated objectives. It is designed to unleash the potential of female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland, who have recently started a business or who have taken concrete steps towards starting a business. The objective is to equip these early stage entrepreneurs with the appropriate knowledge, confidence and networks to successfully start and develop sustainable businesses.



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

MICHAEL CREED TD, MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE

Minister Creed said ***'The ACORNS programme is a tremendous opportunity for early stage female entrepreneurs in rural Ireland to help them realise their ambitions. I would urge those who have recently started or are about to start a new business to apply to participate in this exciting initiative, as it is an opportunity not to be missed. Each year, the participants give an overwhelming endorsement of the role ACORNS has played in supporting them to start and develop their businesses. I am delighted to continue to provide support to this initiative through my Department's Rural Innovation and Development Fund'***.



'ACORNS has been a wonderful experience. It is a great opportunity to meet like-minded people facing similar challenges in business'.

EMILY BRICK, ATHENA ANALYTICS



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