

**Tourism Northern Ireland**  
**Embrace a Giant Spirit**  
**Digital Welcome Programme (Gateway Access Points)**

**2021/2022**

**A capital grant programme to enhance the visitor experience and sense of welcome at Northern Ireland's main Gateway Points through digital investment.**

**PROGRAMME GUIDELINES**

**Capital grants up to £200K**



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# Introduction

## **About Tourism NI**

Tourism NI is responsible for the development of tourism and marketing of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination on the island of Ireland and works closely with Tourism Ireland to sell the destination overseas.

In 2019, tourism in Northern Ireland was a successful £1bn industry, employing 65,000 people. Northern Ireland had just launched a new experience brand 'Embrace a Giant Spirit' (EAGS), to showcase the very best of what Northern Ireland has to offer.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect right across Northern Ireland. It has had far-reaching consequences for the tourism sector.

With tentative signs of overall improvements in the current COVID-19 situation, the tourism sector can once again look to rebuild, recover, and compete in this changed and increasingly competitive market environment.

The restrictions on travel that have been employed globally have significantly impacted on international travel and tourism which has in turn resulted in a dramatic decline in passenger numbers through Northern Ireland's main airports, seaports, and rail hubs.

With the on-going easing of restrictions, the prognosis for the resumption of international travel favorable and improving consumer sentiment, we will be re-focusing our efforts to demonstrate internationally that Northern Ireland is open and once again ready to welcome international visitors. Our gateway points of entry (airports, seaports, and rail hubs) have a key role to play in this regard.

As the tourism sector continues its recovery, Northern Ireland must be prepared for the return to post-pandemic leisure travel and to demonstrate the EAGS welcome and leverage the brand at key visitor touchpoints.

This programme, which is a follow on to the initial Digital Welcome Programme (Commercial Airports), is one of a number of initiatives designed to give Northern Ireland a competitive edge in attracting back domestic and international visitors and to support the Northern Ireland industry to rebuild, recover and compete in this changed environment. It will provide financial assistance to eligible gateways to install digital infrastructure to support an enhanced visitor welcome, increase the level of EAGS branding at key touchpoints and provide a flexible means of showcasing the NIEAGS experience.

Applicants are encouraged to contact Tourism NI in relation to any queries on the content of these guidelines. Please contact [a.mcwilliams@tourismni.com](mailto:a.mcwilliams@tourismni.com) or 028 9044 1694.

## Programme Aim and Outcomes

The aim and outcomes of the programme are to enhance the visitor experience and sense of welcome at major gateways (airports, seaports and rail hubs) to Northern Ireland primarily through digital investment and innovation.

This programme will provide financial assistance (capital expenditure) towards the installation of:

- Digital Technology and other associated infrastructure
- Enhanced 'Embrace a Giant Spirit' branding
- Innovative digital solutions which enhance visitor information, visitor welcome and experience at major gateways.

## What assistance can I expect?

The maximum grant value per applicant is £200,000. Tourism NI financial assistance will not exceed 80% of eligible project costs.

## Eligibility

### Who can apply?

This is a targeted programme for commercial airports, seaports, rail, and bus hubs which prior to 01 March 2020, operated scheduled domestic and/or international passenger services to and from Northern Ireland.

### Minimum Eligibility Criteria

- Business Type: You (as a business) must be located within Northern Ireland.
- Operational Thresholds: You (as a business) should have been operating scheduled domestic and/or international passenger services on or before 01 March 2020.
- Prior to 01 March 2020, you, as a business, should have had a minimum of 100,000 passengers per annum moving through your business (in one or more of the preceding three years of operation).
- Be able to demonstrate that the project will be complete and operational by 1st July 2022.
- Confirm that the business has not applied for, nor is in receipt of additional grant aid from any other sources in respect of the planned investment.

## Eligible Costs

This is a capital funding programme and as such the investment must result in the delivery of a new or enhanced asset which can demonstrate an ability to deliver on the programme aims and outcomes.

The asset must have a useful life of at least two years and the letter of offer conditions will be based on a holding period of a minimum of two years.

The following costs are not eligible for financial assistance:

- Recoverable VAT.
- Contracts that have already been entered into prior to signing our Letter of Offer unless otherwise approved by Tourism NI.
- In-kind support.
- Non-capital costs, e.g. marketing, accreditation schemes, support and maintenance or other running costs.

## How Can I Apply?

Outlined below are the dates that apply to the implementation of this programme:

The programme opens on 28th February and will close to applications at 3 pm on Monday 14th March 2022.

### STAGE 1 – Application and assessment

The closing date for applications is 3 pm on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022, applications cannot be submitted after this time.

If you have any issues or questions when completing the application form, please contact [a.mcwilliams@tourismni.com](mailto:a.mcwilliams@tourismni.com) or 028 9044 1694.

All applicants will be assessed on a pass/fail basis in line with the following criteria:

- Achievement of programme aim and outcomes
- Match Funding – applicants will be required to confirm that match funding (20%) is in place to complete the project
- Deliverability – applicants will be asked to confirm that expenditure will be incurred by 31 March and that the project will be complete and operational by 1 July 2022.

### STAGE 2 – Letter of Offer and Project Delivery

All successful applicants will agree the scope of the work with Tourism NI. Once this scope is agreed to the satisfaction of Tourism NI, a final Letter of Offer will be issued to the applicant.

Successful applicants will be required to sign the Letter of Offer with associated conditions, and this becomes a legally binding document. Applicants will have limited time to accept the offer otherwise it will lapse. The Letter of Offer will require applicants to incur expenditure by 31st March 2022.

Following the implementation of the project, Tourism NI will contact you to get feedback on the impact that the project has had. All applicants will be required to comply with this and all other conditions of the Letter of Offer.

## STAGE 3 – Claiming Your Grant

Grant payments can only be made retrospectively and will be based on eligible expenditure actually incurred and paid. Supporting documentation will be required in the form of invoices, bank statements, etc.

You will be required at the time of grant claim to certify that the project has not applied for, nor is in receipt of additional grant aid from any other source in relation to the proposed investment herein.

Details of the grant claiming process will be provided within the Letter of Offer that the successful applicant will receive.

## Additional Programme Information

Additional programme information is detailed below.

### State Aid

As the UK has left the European Union, the European State Aid rules no longer apply, and, as of 1st January 2021 consideration now falls within the Trade & Cooperation agreement.

Before Tourism NI can pay out the grant, and to ensure legality, businesses will be asked in the application form to confirm that any payment would not result in the business exceeding Special Drawing Rights upper limit, which equates to £350K. Businesses will be asked to consider any de minimis aid that they have received in the current and previous 2 financial years within these thresholds.

### Procurement

You will be required to adhere to Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy. It is essential that you seek advice on this procurement process at the time of application. Failure to adhere to it can result in expenditure being considered ineligible for financial assistance. Detailed information on the public procurement process and the procurement thresholds can be found on the CPD website <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/procurement>

### Appeals Procedure

An appeals procedure is in place for those applicants who deem the process of assessing their project has been conducted unsatisfactorily. Further detail on the appeals procedure is available on request.

## **Equality Statement**

Tourism NI is committed to the fulfilment of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) in both the promotion of equality and of good relations through our overall thinking and decision-making processes. Obligations under this Act will be included in any Letter of Offer issued.

## **FOI and Data Protection**

We are committed to being open about the way we will use information that you give us as part of your application. By submitting the declaration form to validate the application form, applicants are confirming that they understand our obligation to comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

## **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**

By applying for funding, Tourism NI takes care that it respects the rights and freedoms of all those involved. How we handle any personal information we receive in respect to those rights and freedoms is described in our privacy policy.

## **General Terms**

Tourism NI may amend the programme and its guidelines at any time during the period of the programme.

Every care has been taken to ensure accuracy in the compilation of these guidelines. Tourism cannot accept responsibility for omissions or errors, but these will be rectified in future publications when brought to our attention.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Tourism NI to ensure that these guidelines are adhered to. Tourism NI may amend the programme and its guidelines at any time during the period of the programme