

Strategic Partnership Grant Fund Operating Guidelines

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Introduction

Tourism has been identified as having the potential to become a key sector in the transformation of Northern Ireland and to contribute significantly to economic growth. Recognising this, the NI Executive has developed a Tourism Strategy, for the strategic alignment of all tourism activity and investment within Northern Ireland.

Tourism Northern Ireland (Tourism NI) plays a key role in providing strategic direction and policy advice to the NI Executive as well as delivering services in a number of key areas. The success of Tourism NI and its ability to achieve its objectives requires it to work in collaboration with key partners across the tourism sector.

We also need to work with a multitude of different individuals and organisations including government departments, local authorities, government agencies, not for profit organisations and the private sector.

This fund is called the “Strategic Partnership Grant Fund” (SPGF) and this is where we fund third parties through financial support to achieve mutually beneficial tourism objectives.

Section 11 of the Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 provides the power to provide financial assistance to the tourism industry. Tourism NI administers selective financial assistance via the state aid approved Tourism Industry (Financial Assistance) Scheme 1992 (known as the Tourism Development Scheme). The SPGF is approved under this scheme.

Principles of the Scheme

The principles which underpin any support via the SPGF include:

- The scheme is not intended to provide core funding / operational running costs to a strategic partner;
- Funding is not automatically guaranteed in future years, outside the period of the agreement;
- Funding is for a specific project initiative;
- Funding will not be given unless there is a clear link to how the activity being funded contributes towards Tourism NI’s Corporate Plan objectives;
- Funding will not be given if the activity in question already falls within the remit of the partner organisation and that partner organisation is already being funded to carry out this activity; and
- If a partner applies for funds, it should be clear that these are to undertake an activity that is over and above what they are statutorily set up and funded to deliver.
- This fund is a rolling programme.

Aims and Objectives of the Scheme

Aims

The SPGF aims to:

- Enhance the quality of the visitor experience by developing tourism products, services and information aligned to PfG and Tourism NI's Corporate Plan objectives, through those best placed to do so and in turn to strengthen the overall visitor experience in Northern Ireland;
- Foster greater cohesion between bodies who have a role in tourism but for whom tourism is not a primary driver; and
- Raise the profile of the role and importance of tourism as a key driver of the future Northern Ireland economy and secure sustained long term investment, in all tourism sectors and those that impact on tourism, realising this opportunity.

Objectives

Tourism NI's SPGF is designed to facilitate Tourism NI in achieving wider objectives for the tourism sector by working through third parties who are best placed to deliver. These objectives include:

- Providing Tourism NI access to sub-sector (e.g hotels, tour guides etc) specific knowledge or expertise which can be utilised in development of strategy, policy and decision making;
- Ensuring delivery of key Tourism NI priorities for tourism growth through championing by associations and access membership;
- Improving the quality of sub-sector services by developing and/or enhancing the visitor experience;
- Co-ordination of activity by individual organisations within sub-sectors;
- Consistency of delivery by individual organisations through sub-sectors;
- Implementation of Tourism NI schemes and services in sub-sectors; and
- To raise the profile of tourism and key tourism priorities.
- To raise the profile of Northern Ireland as a short break destination.

Recipients of Financial Support

The business justification for awarding funding is made on the basis of which organisation is best placed to assist Tourism NI with achieving its wider tourism objectives for the Northern Ireland economy.

Tourism NI will identify key partners to deliver specific activity on our behalf. Where an opportunity presents itself to undertake innovative activities, but that are outside the capability of Tourism NI manpower resources we may engage in a strategic partnership to assist with the delivery of Tourism NI Corporate Plan objectives.

The SPGF will primarily support partners who demonstrate a shared vision and can assist in delivering a £1 billion export industry by 2025. To achieve this Tourism NI will seek partnerships with those businesses who are:

Market led focused on priority markets and segments that present the best opportunity for growth.

Product focused aiming to invest in globally competitive tourism infrastructure.

People orientated to build and improve the capability and capacity of their workforce.

Commercially driven and encouraging innovation and developing operating models that help them remain competitive.

Visitor centric by placing the visitor at everything the business does.

Experience based by offering high quality, unique and differentiated experiences.

Level of Financial Commitment

The SPGF can provide financial support to a single recipient of up to:

- £100,000 in a single financial year or £300,000 over three years.
- £300,000 but less than £500,000 over three years - Department of the Economy approval will be required.
- If more than £500,000 over three years - Department of Finance approval will be required.

Any financial support may be provided at an intervention rate of up to 100% of eligible expenditure.

Strategic Partner Selection Eligibility Checks and Assessment Criteria

Before embarking on negotiation with a potential partner, it is advisable to undertake a number of **eligibility checks**:

- Consider whether the activities being proposed is capable of being delivered through another more appropriate Tourism NI funding scheme;
- Check on Flexigrant / Sage that the potential recipient is not already being funded by Tourism NI to deliver similar outcomes;

- If a Voluntary or community sector organisation check the [Government Funding Datatbase](#) to ensure same objectives haven't already been funded by another public sector organisation;
- Potential grantees must declare if they are in receipt of funding from another public sector body and if it is in relation to delivery of similar outcomes. Tourism NI can not double fund the same outcomes, additionality must be achieved. Declarations from the grantees must be made by either their Director of Finance or their Chief Executive;
- Potential grantees must also declare if they have had funding removed or declined in the past. Tourism NI can only be used to deliver additional activity above and beyond just core activities. Again, declarations from the grantees must be made by either their Director of Finance or their Chief Executive.

There are several key **assessment criteria** that must be met before a strategic partner may be funded under the SPGF. These include:

- **Strategic Fit** - when assessing the potential grantees of the fund, the purpose of the funding will always be considered against objectives laid down in Tourism NI's Corporate Plan;
- **Proposed costs** – should be investigated to check **value for money**, specifically relating to the reasonableness and necessity of the costs and that the contribution being sought or offered is needed. When conducting checks on reasonableness and necessity it is important to ensure additionality and / or innovative approvals / activities are being propped.
- **Deliverability** – is the strategic partner capable of delivering the outcomes in line with Tourism NI requirements. Key areas to investigate are the partners' legal status, track record, is it a going concern.

Business Case

It will be the responsibility of the account manager to develop the Business Case to justify the financial assistance provision through the SPGF. In doing so the account manager must adhere to the strict guidelines laid down in Tourism NI advice about completing business cases, which can be found in the [Financial Procedures Manual](#), which can be found on the intranet under Staff Information | Policies and Procedures | NITB Guidelines.

There are three business case templates, depending on the value of financial assistance. Each has respective approval requirements.

- [Under £50,000](#)
- [£50,000 to £250,00](#)
- [Over £250,000](#)

Types of Financial Agreement

Under this scheme, there are two types of financial agreement, a Letter of Offer and a Service Level Agreement (SLA).

In deciding which financial assistance should be used the following rules should be observed:

- **Letter of Offer (LoO)**
 - Tourism NI is entering into a strategic partnership with an organisation or individual from the private, community or voluntary sectors.
 - Tourism NI is taking advantage of an opportunity with a key partner.

- **Service Level Agreement (SLA)**
 - Tourism NI is entering into a strategic partnership with another Public Body eg Local Authority or Government Department / ALB / NDPB;
 - It is likely that more than one department / unit in Tourism NI is likely to be working in partnership with a strategic partner so it is essential to try and incorporate all the objectives required of a strategic partnership by working collaboratively to develop the SLA.

Letters of Offer and Service Level Agreement templates can be found at Appendices 1 and 2. It is the responsibility of the account manager to complete the form.

Payment Process

Financial Support of up to £100,000

The LoO / SLA should identify the specific objectives to be delivered and the associated costs.

Once the grantee has signed the LoO / SLA, the account manager should ensure that a purchase order is raised for the amount stipulated in the LoO / SLA. The purchase order will be electronically created and approved by two separate individuals in accordance with delegated authority limits as laid down in the Financial Procedures Manual.

Once the activity is complete or in line with the agreed payment schedule, per the LoO / SLA, the grantee may submit their claim see appendix 3.

The account manager will check the validity of the claim, and if they are content the purchase order number may be released for quotation on the invoice to TNI. Once the invoice is received it will be passed to finance for processing.

All physical invoices are scanned and attached and sent to the appropriate individual for approval via Workflow.

The invoice authoriser will receive an email stating that an invoice(s) is awaiting authorisation. For invoices up to £50,000, the authoriser may be any individual in the organisation, but they **must** be different to the individual responsible for approving the PO. The authoriser is responsible for ensuring that the invoice relates to a PO and the value of the associated invoice is appropriate. For invoices greater than £50,000, approval must be sought from the Chief Executive Officer.

Financial Assistance of over £100,000

On a case by case instance, grantees of over £100,000 financial support may be eligible to receive upfront payment of up to 50% due to the duration and potential complexity of the project. This will be agreed at the outset between the account manager and the grantee.

After signing the LoO / SLA, payment will be initiated by the raising of a purchase order.

The release of the remaining grant will follow a similar process to that of the under £100,000 process.

Appendices:

1. Letter of Offer Template
2. Service Level Agreement Template
3. Claim Form Template