



Tourist | Experience Development Industry Scheme Programme 2021-2023

PROGRAMME GUIDELINES FOR CAPITAL GRANTS FROM £40,000 to £450,000

A capital grant programme to develop new tourism experiences and enhance existing tourism experiences.



**tourism
northernireland**

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1.

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.

Under the Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, Tourism NI is empowered to provide selective financial assistance to the tourism sector in Northern Ireland. This financial assistance programme is for projects that seek to achieve economic growth for Northern Ireland.

In 2019, tourism in Northern Ireland was a successful £1bn industry, employing 65,000 people. Tourism NI had just launched a new experience brand to showcase the very best of what Northern Ireland had to offer. Alongside some of our existing world class experiences, a collection of new and unique experiences was injecting a fresh excitement into the Northern Ireland tourism offer.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect right across Northern Ireland and has had far-reaching consequences for the tourism sector. While in the current climate it is difficult to make any predictions, it is likely that the tourism sector will not

return to pre-crisis revenue levels for a number of years. It is also highly likely that the majority of demand in the short to medium term will be from closer to home markets. More information on market reviews can be found at:

<https://www.tourismni.com/build-your-business/opportunities-campaigns/>

This programme is one of a number of programmes and initiatives to support the Northern Ireland tourism industry to rebuild, recover and compete in this changed environment. Northern Ireland will need to develop new and compelling experiences that entice people out to explore what Northern Ireland has to offer, in what will be an increasingly competitive marketplace. This programme will provide financial assistance to eligible tourism organisations to help them do so and ensure that Northern Ireland is well placed to compete in this transformed environment.

Potential applicants are encouraged to contact Tourism NI in relation to any queries on the content of these guidelines. Any offer of financial assistance is subject to budget availability.

You can contact the Capital Funding Team through the Online Enquiry Form [tourismni.com/contact-us](https://www.tourismni.com/contact-us) or by Phone: 028 9592 6340

Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit

The tourism brand, Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit, is used by Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to promote Northern Ireland on the island of Ireland and internationally with the aim of growing the visitor economy and ensuring economic impact across all regions of Northern Ireland. Research conducted by Tourism NI demonstrated that this brand concept reflected our history, culture and people and had the ability to significantly increase intention to visit Northern Ireland.

The brand is based upon the essence of the visitor experience for those who visit Northern Ireland - the giant spirit of the people, authentic local experiences and the magnificence of the landscape.

Our giant promise Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit means two things: sharing the giant spirit of Northern Ireland and awakening the giant spirit in our visitors. This programme has been designed to provide financial assistance to tourism organisations to support them in creating experiences that embrace our giant spirit and stimulate demand for Northern Ireland tourism to the benefit of its wider economy.

The Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit brand will be integral to the application and assessment of proposed projects. More information on the experience brand Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit can be found at:

<https://www.tourismni.com/build-your-business/sector/activities-attractions/activities-and-attractions-trends-and-opportunities/northern-ireland-embrace-a-giant-spirit/>



2.

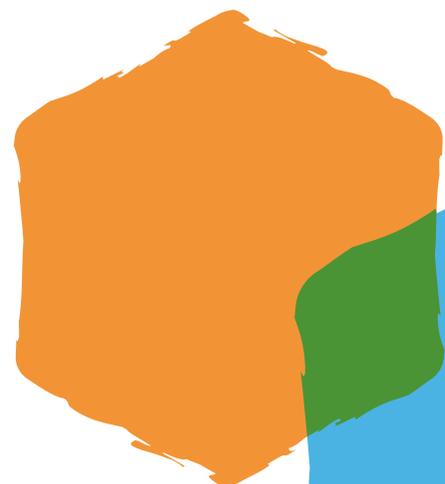
Programme Aim

The overall Programme Aim is to develop new and enhanced demand generating tourism experiences to support tourism recovery and growth. The programme aims to improve the range and quality of experiences throughout Northern Ireland in line with our experience brand – Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit.

This programme will take place in a very particular context: one of significant challenge and one of significant opportunity. It is bounded, on one side, by the COVID-19 pandemic which has devastated the tourism industry as we knew it and, on the other, by the opportunity to build back better and leverage the Embrace a Giant Spirit brand.

The programme will focus on attractions, and other experience providers that are unique demand generators. We want these experiences to not only be open, accessible and trading, but also increasingly competitive to attract more visitors and spend to the wider economy.

Over the next number of years, the tourism marketplace, from both a destination and individual business perspective, will be fiercely competitive.



In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tourism NI has developed a suite of industry supports and initiatives designed to support the Northern Ireland tourism industry to rebuild, recover and compete in this changed environment – helping stimulate and support the industry to build competitiveness within their business.

This programme will support tourism businesses to develop giant experiences (new or improved) that deliver on the brand promise and support the continued recovery of the Northern Ireland tourism sector. Where applications exceed demand, priority will be given to those projects that demonstrate the greatest potential to support our industry to rebuild and recover.

The aim of this programme is not to support implementation of the requirements to deliver business safely in the COVID-19 pandemic. However, applications are welcome where proposals bring new and innovative ways to do this well, enhancing the experience, supporting demand generation and increasing consumer confidence. Potential applicants are encouraged to contact Tourism NI in relation to any queries.

3.

Programme Outcomes

This is an outcomes based programme and our objectives are to fund those projects which demonstrate the best prospects of delivering on the outcomes noted below. Applications under this programme should be aligned to one or more of the outcomes and to the Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit brand promise.

- Increase our domestic and international reputation as an attractive holiday destination
- Build the number of visitors who come here
- Increase the length of time visitors spend here
- Increase the amount of money that visitors spend per head
- Support the growth of our large, medium and small tourism businesses
- Support the development of an economically and environmentally sustainable tourism economy
- Support regional and seasonal extension
- Support the growth and development of our night-time economy offer

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How much Financial Assistance can I expect?

The amount of financial assistance available under this programme is between £40,000 and £450,000.

Tourism NI financial assistance will not exceed:

- 80% of eligible project costs for private sector and voluntary/ community sector applicants
- 50% of eligible project costs for public sector applicants

Tourism NI will not exceed the delegated percentages detailed above.

5.

Eligibility

Who Can Apply?

To apply you must be an existing tourism experience provider, located and operating in Northern Ireland.

- **Private Sector** - Companies and other legal entities and individuals
- **Public Sector** - Commercial and non-commercial semi state organisations/ Local authorities
- **Voluntary/Community Sector** – community and not for profit bodies including companies limited by guarantee. Applicants from the Voluntary/Community sector will be required to have a Charity No./ Unique Reference Number (URN) as evidence that they qualify for this status



Tourism NI welcomes applications from collaborations in relation to the development of enhanced experiences. However, a lead applicant must be nominated and the lead partner will be required to comply with all minimum eligibility criteria. Potential applicants are encouraged to contact Tourism NI for any clarifications.

PLEASE NOTE: Tourism NI does not provide financial assistance towards the development of accommodation. This is supported through Invest NI investni.com

The programme is focused on tourism experience providers and the following are ineligible under this programme:

- Accommodation businesses, with the possible exceptions outlined at Minimum Eligibility Criteria (point 1)
- Festivals and Events
- Spa and leisure facilities
- Sports Clubs
- Business start-ups
- Restaurants, cafes, retail stores and music venues etc
- Costs to comply with statutory legislation

Minimum Eligibility Criteria

1. **Business Type:** You must be an experience provider located and operating within Northern Ireland. Accommodation providers and others outlined in the ineligible list above are not eligible to apply.

However, in the case of accommodation providers, if your project relates to a demand generating experience separate from your accommodation provision, the experience may be eligible. We would encourage you to seek guidance from the Capital Funding Team before completing an application.

2. **Operational Thresholds:** You (as a business) should have been operational on or before 1st August 2019. Tourism NI will seek evidence of these operational thresholds. However, in limited circumstances, if you haven't been operational on or before 1st August 2019 you must supply Tourism NI with sufficient independent evidence that there is a strong future pipeline of business, this requirement may be reviewed.
3. **Match Funding:** You must be in a position to confirm match funding for the project. You will be asked to provide evidence that, in addition to Tourism NI's financial assistance, you have the necessary level of funding to cover the full project costs.
4. **Deliverability (asset ownership and other rights):** You must be in a position to demonstrate ownership and/or all other rights required to operate the experience. You will be asked to provide evidence that you have the necessary ownership or other rights when you apply.

5. Deliverability (financial): You must demonstrate that you will be able to incur sufficient expenditure by 31st March 2023 to draw down all funding under this programme.
6. Deliverability (operational): You must confirm that you will be able to launch the experience (open to the public and bookable online) by 31st March 2023.
7. Project Deliverables: This is a capital funding programme and the project must result in the delivery of a new or enhanced asset. For the purposes of this programme, the resulting asset should have an estimated life of 2 to 5 years, contingent on the amount of financial assistance awarded. In limited circumstances, where a significant return on investment can be demonstrated this time limit/holding period may be reviewed.
8. Minimum Grant Thresholds: Applications must be for a minimum grant of £40,000.
9. Business Viability: You must be able to confirm that the business was a viable business prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and has taken all reasonable steps to safeguard the future of the business. Tourism NI reserves the right to seek independent evidence of this requirement where deemed necessary.

Eligible Costs

What we may support

Proposed projects should fall under one of the following categories:

- New product development
- Existing product enhancement

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

Whilst the below is not an exhaustive list, examples of the types of projects which may be supported include:

- Enhanced animation of the visitor experience at existing attractions/sites
- Enhanced interpretation and signage to improve the visitor experience



- Improved capacity and visitor management solutions
- Investment in infrastructure or equipment, including safety equipment which supports the delivery of world class experiences
- All weather infrastructure to enhance experiences or improve seasonality
- Investment which enhances coastal and water based experiences
- Investment which is likely to support innovation in tourism experience delivery
- Investment which supports the development of more environmentally sustainable tourism experiences
- Immersive technology solutions to manage and enhance the visitors experience, including assistive technology to enhance the experience for people with disabilities
- Contracts that have already been entered into prior to signing of our Letter of Offer unless they have been overseen by our procurement advisors (Construction and Procurement Delivery, CPD) or otherwise approved by Tourism NI
- In kind support
- Minimum safety requirements that need to be undertaken to deliver your business safely in the COVID-19 pandemic. However, proposals for new and innovative ways to do this well, enhancing the experience, supporting demand generation and increasing consumer confidence may be considered
- Stand-alone mobile/digital apps (unless integral to deliver an interactive experience supporting the outcomes of this programme)
- Conference, spa and leisure facilities aligned to accommodation
- Motor vehicles including land, water and air based vehicles
- Stand-alone restaurants, cafes, retail stores
- Business start-up activities
- Non capital costs e.g. marketing, feasibility/technical studies, terms of reference, accreditation schemes, training, festivals/events, maintenance costs, employee salaries, normal administrative/running costs etc.
- Ongoing operational costs, e.g. Licences, Warranties, cooking equipment such as crockery cutlery, general walking equipment (non-safety), trailers etc.

Ineligible Costs

The following costs and areas of activity are not eligible for financial assistance:

- Purchase of land
- Recoverable VAT

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How Can I Apply?

Outlined below are the stages that apply to the implementation of this programme.

The programme will open on 23rd August 2021.

Applicants are required to submit their expression of interest as soon as possible, and no later than 6th September 2021 at 3pm.

The closing date for full applications is 4th October 2021 at 3pm.

This is an online application programme with the various stages set out below. Please note, if you have previously used Tourism NI's online forms you should use your existing username and password to apply. If you are a new user, please register to gain access to the form.

Stage 1 - Expression of Interest

Prior to submitting your expression of interest, you should first check your eligibility for the programme by reading these guidelines.

You must then complete an online Expression of Interest form which can be found at tni.flexigrant.com. After logging in, please select the 'Application Portal' tab at the top of the screen and select 'Start' to begin your Expression of Interest form.

The closing date for expression of interest is 6th September 2021 at 3pm. Forms cannot be submitted after this time.

If you have any issues or questions when completing the expression of interest form, please contact the Capital Funding Team through the Online Enquiry Form tourismni.com/contact-us or by Phone: 028 9592 6340.

Once your expression of interest has been received it will have to demonstrate that it meets the Minimum Eligibility Criteria and those that do not will not be progressed.



Stand Up Paddle Board
- Strangford Lough

Expressions of interest will be reviewed and applicants will be notified of the eligibility outcome by Tourism NI.

Applicants who meet the Minimum Eligibility Criteria will receive access to an online application form.

Stage 2 - Application

Only applications submitted online to Tourism NI can be accepted.

The closing date for applications is 4th October 2021 at 3pm, applications cannot be submitted after this time.

As part of the application, you will be required to submit:

- Statutory accounts for 2019
- Statutory accounts for 2020 (if available)
- Up to date management accounts or bank statements if not available
- Financial projections for 2 years post project implementation
- Summary of any statutory approvals required for the project (For example, planning permission)

Before submitting your application, you must also ensure:

- That the application form is fully completed
- Any supporting documentation requested in the application has been uploaded
- A legible copy of the signed declaration form has been uploaded to validate your application form

It is essential that you seek advice on the procurement process at the time of application. Failure to adhere to the correct procurement process can result in expenditure being considered ineligible for financial assistance. Refer to page 14 for more information.

Stage 3 - Assessment (including assessment criteria)

The programme is limited in terms of budget to support capital investment. Once your application has been received it will be competitively assessed and scored by an assessment panel in line with the criteria below.

1. Achievement of Programme Aims and Outcomes

- Applications should outline how the project will deliver against the aim and outcomes of the programme as outlined on pages 5 and 6.

2. Assessment of Need

- The application should clearly define the market opportunity for the proposed project, the need for investment and how it will appeal to the priority markets and segments. More information on market reviews can be found at:

<https://www.tourismni.com/build-your-business/opportunities-campaigns/>

3. Return on Investment/Value for Money

- The application should clearly set out how this project can deliver a strong return on investment and value for money in terms of its ability to support tourism recovery and growth.

4. Alignment with Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit

- The application will require a detailed outline of how the project aligns with the new experience brand - Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit. Additional guidance is available at: <https://www.tourismni.com/build-your-business/sector/activities-attractions/activities-and-attractions-trends-and-opportunities/northern-ireland-embrace-a-giant-spirit/>

5. Match Funding - Applications must demonstrate a financially viable project. Applicants will be asked at this stage to provide evidence that all match funding is in place.

6. Deliverability - Applications should outline how the project will be managed to ensure delivery on time, on budget and to quality. Applicants will, at this stage, be required to elaborate and provide increased assurance in relation to all aspects of deliverability including ownership, financial and operational deliverability considerations outlined under Minimum Eligibility Criteria on page 8. This will also include assurances in relation to all necessary statutory approvals. Specifically, applicants must demonstrate how their project will incur sufficient expenditure to draw down their grant award by 31st March 2023.

7. Project Promotion and Marketing

- Marketing costs are not included within this programme. Applications should outline how

the project will be marketed and provide assurances in relation to any necessary budget required to market it.

8. Outcomes Management and Monitoring - The application must identify how project outcomes will be delivered, managed and monitored.

9. Equality and Accessibility - Applicants should show how the project will meet the differing needs of all the Section 75 groups in addition to ensuring that it is fully accessible to all.

Following the assessment process, successful projects will be subject to approvals commensurate with the amount of grant sought. Applicants will be advised of the progress at relevant stages of the assessment/ approval process.

Tourism NI reserves the right to maintain a reserve list of projects should more budget become available.

Stage 4 - Project Implementation

Successful applicants will be required to sign a Letter of Offer with associated conditions and this becomes a legally binding document. Applicants will have 2 weeks to accept the Offer otherwise it will lapse.

The Letter of Offer will require applicants to be registered, or commit to apply for registration, to the UK wide industry standard “**We’re Good to Go**”.

Once you have signed the Letter of Offer, you can then begin to implement your project.

Sufficient expenditure must be incurred by 31st March 2023 to allow draw down of the full grant.

All projects financially assisted by Tourism NI are required to adhere to **Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy**.

It is expected that you and your appointed contractors/suppliers will liaise closely with Tourism NI and their consultants during implementation.

Following implementation of the project, Tourism NI will seek necessary assurances that the work has been undertaken appropriately and that an asset has been enhanced prior to payment being made. If Tourism NI is not satisfied with the nature or level of implementation, changes will have to be made to the satisfaction of Tourism NI prior to sign off and payment.

Stage 5 - Project Completion Report

Following the implementation of the project, Tourism NI will review the project and 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 for the duration of the holding period, which in this case will be two years from the date of launch of the new or redeveloped experience.

Stage 6 - Claiming your Grant

Grant payments can only be made retrospectively to the applicant specified in the Letter of Offer, and will be based on eligible expenditure actually incurred and paid by the applicant. The requisite expenditure, to allow drawdown of grant, must be incurred by 31st March 2023.

You will be required, at the time of grant claim, to certify that the project has not applied for, nor is it in receipt of additional grant aid from any other source. Supporting documentation will be required in the form of invoices, bank statements etc.

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

7.

Additional Programme Information

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.

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>

EU-UK Trade & Co-operation Agreement (TCA)

When this grant is provided to economic actors and is a subsidy, as defined in Article 363(1) of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), Tourism NI confirms the scheme complies with the 6 principles set out in Article 366 of the TCA.

Tourism NI also confirms that Article 367(prohibited subsidies and subsidies subject to controls) does not apply, it will ensure compliance with Article 368 (use of subsidies) and it will meet all its obligations on transparency, consultations, the provision of information and recovery as set out in Articles 369 - 373. Full details relating to the TCA can be found [here](#).

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

Tourism NI is 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.

New applicants will be asked to accept the policy before proceeding to the online application form.



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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.
These programme guidelines can be made available on request in Braille, audio and large print.
Every care has been taken to ensure accuracy in the compilation of these guidelines.
Tourism NI cannot accept responsibility for omissions or errors but these will be rectified in future publications when brought to our attention.



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