

Tourist Industry  
Scheme



tourism  
northernireland

Northern  
Ireland  
Embrace  
a Giant  
Spirit



# Experience Development Programme 2020/2021



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

**PROGRAMME GUIDELINES  
FOR CAPITAL GRANTS FROM £5,000 TO £200,000**

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The Walled City

# 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 recent COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect right across Northern Ireland. It 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://tourismni.com/Grow-Your-Business/know-your-customer/markets-and-segments/>

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

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. You can contact the Capital Funding Team by email: [tds@tourismni.com](mailto:tds@tourismni.com), phone: 028 95926340 or selecting 'email us' on the online application portal.

## Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit

The new 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 new 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 experiences. More information on the new experience brand Northern Ireland Embrace a Giant Spirit can be found at: <https://tourismni.com/Grow-Your-Business/northern-ireland---embrace-a-giant-spirit/>



Armagh Cider Company

## 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 new 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 lever the Embrace a Giant Spirit brand.

The programme will focus on attractions, venues 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.

The requirement to invest in the competitiveness of the Northern Ireland offer remains more important than ever following the COVID-19 pandemic, due to changed consumer expectations, different patterns of consumption and an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Businesses which were previously successful and sustainable are now vulnerable due to the loss of revenue as a result of the collapse in consumer demand and the time that is likely to be required for demand to return. Feedback collected from the Northern Ireland Tourism Recovery Working Group indicates that many destination demand generators (attractions, venues and experience providers) have put investment plans on hold. The core consumer markets have changed significantly for many businesses who now need to adapt their offer to appeal to closer to home markets and transformed consumer demand.

The programme will support tourism businesses to develop giant experiences (new or improved) that deliver on the brand promise and support 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.

# 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

## How much financial assistance can I expect?

The amount of financial assistance available under this programme is between £5,000 and £200,000.

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



Crom Estate

# 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 Voluntary / Community sector will be required to have a Charity No. as evidence that they qualify for this status

Note: 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.

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). Tourism NI does not provide financial assistance towards the development of accommodation. This is supported through Invest NI ([www.investni.com](http://www.investni.com))
- Festivals and Events
- Sports Clubs
- Business start-ups, with the possible exceptions outlined at Minimum Eligibility Criteria (point 2)
- Shops, cafes, restaurants etc., with the possible exceptions outlined at Minimum Eligibility Criteria (point 1)

## Minimum Eligibility Criteria

1. **Business Type:** You must be an experience provider located within Northern Ireland. Accommodation providers and others outlined in the ineligible list above are not eligible to apply. However, if the proposed project relates to a demand generating experience in addition to your accommodation or other core business, you may be eligible to apply.
2. **Operational thresholds:** You (as a business) should have been operational on or before 01 August 2018. However, in limited circumstances, if you haven't been operational on or before 01 August 2018 and Tourism NI can get sufficient independent evidence that there is a strong future pipeline of business, this requirement may be relaxed. Tourism NI will seek evidence of these operational thresholds.
3. **Match Funding:** You must be in a position to confirm the match funding. You will be asked to provide evidence that you have the necessary level of match funding when you apply.
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 31 March 2021 to draw down all funding under this programme.
6. **Deliverability (operational):** You must demonstrate that you will be able to launch the experience (open to the public and bookable online) by March 2022 at the latest.
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 years or more. In limited circumstances, where a significant return on investment can be demonstrated this time limit/holding period may be relaxed.
8. **Minimum grant thresholds:** Applications must be for a minimum grant of £5,000.
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.
10. **State Aid:** You must not be in breach of State Aid rules with regard to the General Block Exemption Regulations (GBER) provided under SA.52531 (GBER Article 53). A declaration of this will be requested should your application be successful. For more information, please refer to the State Aid section on page 11 of this document.

## 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 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

## Ineligible Costs

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

- Purchase of land
- Recoverable VAT
- 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 facilities aligned to accommodation
- Construction, maintenance or upgrading of major transport infrastructures such as roads, airports, ferry terminals etc.
- Motor vehicles
- Stand-alone restaurants, cafes, retail stores (unless necessary to deliver the enhanced experience required under the project)
- 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.

# How Can I Apply?

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

The programme will open on **24 August 2020** and will close for applications on **25 September 2020 at 3pm**. Applicants are required to submit their expressions of interest as soon as possible (and no later than **14 September 2020 at 3pm**) to ensure that, where eligible, they can submit their full application by **25 September 2020 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 <https://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. If you have any issues or questions when completing the expression of interest form, please contact the Capital Funding Team by email: [tds@tourismni.com](mailto:tds@tourismni.com), phone: **028 95926340** or selecting 'email us' on the online application portal.

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.

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 **3pm on 25 September 2020**, applications cannot be submitted after this time.

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

- Statutory accounts for 2019
- Up to date management accounts or bank statements if not available
- Financial projections for 2 years post project implementation
- 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 scanned copy of the signed declaration form has been uploaded to validate your application form



## STAGE 3 - ASSESSMENT

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.

- **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 4 and 5.
- **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://tourismni.com/Grow-Your-Business/know-your-customer/markets-and-segments>
- **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.
- **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. An experience development template will be provided as part of the application. Additional guidance is available at: <https://tourismni.com/globalassets/grow-your-business/embrace-a-giant-spirit/eags-experience-development-toolkit.pdf>
- **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.
- **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 6 . 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 31 March 2021. Applicants will also be required to be registered, or commit to apply for registration, to the UK wide industry standard “We’re Good to Go” in relation to the funded project.
- **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.
- **Outcomes Management and Monitoring** - The application must identify how project outcomes will be delivered, managed and monitored.
- **Equality and Accessibility** - Applicants should show how the project will meet the differing needs of all the S75 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 31 March 2021 to allow draw down of the full grant.

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 IMPLEMENTATION 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 31 March 2021.

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.



Ulster American Folk Park

# 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>

## State Aid

This programme falls under the Tourist Industry Scheme, which is registered with the European Commission under the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) under reference number SA.52531. All projects must comply with the general conditions in the GBER and the specific conditions detailed in Article 53 (Aid for culture and heritage conservation). Tourism NI will confirm compliance with these conditions during the appraisal process, but applicants must ensure all information provided is accurate, as they would be required to repay some or all of the State Aid they have received (including interest), if it is found that the application does not comply with all the relevant GBER conditions.

Further detail can be found at:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:02014R0651-20170710>

## 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.



Whiskey on the Rocks

## 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.

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.