



Tourist
Industry Scheme

**Website Development
Programme 2021/2022
for Accommodation Providers**
(Hotels, Guesthouses and Guest Accommodation)

**PROGRAMME GUIDELINES
FOR CAPITAL GRANTS UP TO £40,000**

A programme designed to help accommodation providers develop their websites and digital presence and support business recovery & growth.



tourism
northernireland

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1.

Introduction

In 2019, tourism in Northern Ireland was a successful £1bn industry, employing 65,000 people. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect right across Northern Ireland. Its economic impact has been felt most acutely by the tourism and hospitality sectors. As businesses recover and adapt to the post-COVID environment, it is vital that they embrace new technologies and ways of working, to give themselves the best possible platforms and competitive advantages.

The competitive nature of the tourism marketplace over the next few years cannot be underestimated. It will be vitally important that the Northern Ireland tourism offering is promoted across digital platforms in an appealing and compelling way. The recent pandemic has resulted in a transformed demand, with a desire to visit and book differently. While online promotion and bookability was increasingly becoming a prerequisite prior to the pandemic, it is now a core requirement of doing business. For many, optimising their online marketing and sales capability to present new and rejuvenated experiences will be a competitive differentiator.

This programme is operated on a Northern Ireland wide basis with funding from the Department for Economy (DfE). See **'About Us'** for further information on Tourism Northern Ireland. The programme is being administered and managed by Tourism NI.

2.

Programme Aim

The majority of visitors to Northern Ireland like to book their arrangements independently. The internet is therefore a crucial mechanism for the visitor to use in their travel planning, both prior and during their visit.

This programme aims to provide support to accommodation providers to develop or enhance their websites and digital presence, through the provision of a Digital Audit and Website Development Plan - that will then be used to support business recovery & growth.

The Digital Audit and Website Development Plan will look at a wide range of support including: search engine optimisation; booking engine development; optimisation of mobile and smartphone platforms; provision of the right content; and the use of the right tactics to capture sales.

3.

Programme Objectives

- To ensure that individual websites are optimised in line with recommendations from the Digital Audit/ Website Development Plan - in order to create positive first impressions, retain interest, enhance engagement on the site and drive enquiries and revenue.
- To improve the quality of online content for the accommodation sector by enhancing their existing web presence and booking platforms and developing sites for those providers who have little or no digital presence.
- To support accommodation providers to market and sell their offering in a post-COVID-19 environment by recognising transformed demand; visitor desire to visit differently and book differently; and the need for timely and clear communication of changes and updates.
- To ensure mobile optimisation.
- To improve conversion rates .
- To provide structured support and guidance to accommodation providers to enhance their online analytical capabilities and ongoing website optimisation.

4 (a).

What Assistance Can I Expect?

Successful applicants to the scheme will receive:

- **A Digital Audit and Website Development Plan** – All eligible applicants (subject to available funding) will undergo a structured review of their website or will receive suggestions for the development of their website (if they don't have a digital presence); and will receive a Website Development Plan. This review will cover a range of areas including design and content.
- **1 to 1 Mentoring Support**
All eligible applicants (subject to available funding) will get direct 1 to 1 mentoring and support based on their Website Development Plan.
- **Financial Assistance***
Based on the findings within the Digital Audit and Website Development Plan, some applicants will have the opportunity to submit a full application to apply for financial assistance towards eligible costs to develop their website (as set out in their Website Development Plan). Applicants who previously availed of financial support via the Co-Operative Marketing Fund in 2020/21 aligned to website activity and website content development will not be eligible for funding for further activity of this nature under this programme.

4 (b).

How Much Financial Assistance Can I Expect?

For those applicants who progress to apply for financial assistance, the following applies:

Grant rate: Financial assistance will not exceed 80% of total eligible project costs.

Grant amount: The maximum amount of grant funding available under this programme for any one project is £40,000.

***Please note, the programme is limited in terms of budget to support all requested mentoring and capital enhancements. Applicants will be selected through an application process and, where demand exceeds budget, will be prioritized in line with potential return on investment and need for development.**

5.

Eligibility

Who Can Apply?

To apply, you must be an existing accommodation provider, operating in Northern Ireland. The programme is open to the following sectors:

- **Private Sector:** Companies and other legal entities and individuals
- **Voluntary / Community Sector:** Community and not for profit bodies including companies limited by guarantee. Applicants from this sector will be required to have a Charity Number as evidence that they qualify for this status.

The programme is focused on tourism accommodation providers and the following businesses and websites are **ineligible** under this programme:

- Public sector: commercial and semi state organisations and local authorities.
- Festivals and Events.
- Sports Clubs.
- Day Spas.
- Business start-ups.
- Local authority or destination management tourism websites.
- Visitor Information Centres.
- Community / Voluntary information websites.
- Shops, restaurants, cafes, etc.

Minimum Eligibility Criteria

1. Business Type:

You must be a current accommodation provider, operating a business located within Northern Ireland and your property must be certified with Tourism Northern Ireland within the categories of either Hotel, Guesthouse or Guest Accommodation.

Information on the different categories of accommodation is available from

<https://www.tourismni.com/build-your-business/sector/accommodation/accommodation-getting-started/what-are-the-different-accommodation-categories/>

2. Operational Thresholds:

You (as a business) should have been operational on or before 01 September 2019.

Your accommodation business must have an annual turnover in excess of £250k per annum, achieved in at least one of the of the previous three financial years.



Tourism Northern Ireland will seek proof of turnover levels by the uploading of a relevant set of statutory accounts at the Expression of Interest Stage.

3. Website Ownership:

If you currently have an operational website you must own and be in a position to verify this if required. For new websites funded under this programme, ownership by the applicant business will be verified as a grant prepayment condition.

4. Match Funding:

You must be in a position to confirm the required match funding. You will be asked to provide evidence that you have this level of match funding when you apply for the grant.

5. Discover Northern Ireland Listing

Your business must have a current Discover Northern Ireland website listing.

6. 'We're Good to Go' Registration

Your business must be currently registered with the industry standard 'We're Good to Go' Programme.



Eligible Costs

The following are examples of the type of work/ costs that are eligible for financial assistance:

- Development of website (if there is no existing digital presence).
- Replacement of, or upgrade to, current website.
- Booking engines, online booking functionality, improving conversion rates and improving user experience.
- Content development e.g. imagery and video.
- Mobile optimisation.
- Improvement to Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and website content.
- Integrated social media (not standalone).
- Foreign Language provision.

Ineligible Costs

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

- Website hosting fees.
- Any ongoing website management costs, maintenance costs, administrative running costs.
- Online advertising.
- Stand-alone apps.
- Employee salaries.
- Recoverable VAT.
- Corporate branding, merchandise or printed materials.

6.

How can I apply?

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

Stage 1 - Expression of Interest and Applicant Selection

The programme will open on 15th November 2021 at 3.00pm.

You must first check your eligibility for the programme by reading these guidelines. If your business is eligible, please indicate your interest by completing an Expression of Interest form at <https://tni.flexigrant.com>. A final decision on your eligibility will be made by Tourism NI following submission of the form. Expression of Interest forms received after the closing date will not be accepted.

The closing date for receipt of Expression of Interest forms is 29th November 2021 at 3.00pm.

Eligible completed Expression of Interest forms will be assessed on a competitive basis, taking into account the aim and objectives of the programme. Where demand exceeds available budget, Tourism NI will prioritise in line with potential return on investment and the greatest need for development of / or improvement to websites.

All applicants to the programme will be notified of the outcome by Tourism NI. Based on the assessment process, not all applicants will necessarily proceed to Stage 2 (and subsequent stages) of the programme.

Stage 2 - Digital Audit and Website Development Plan

Once the Expression of Interest forms have been assessed, those which scored highest within budget availability will proceed to this stage of the process.

Consultants engaged directly by Tourism NI will undertake a digital audit and review of your existing website. This will encompass content, layout, user experience, search engine optimisation, etc. against a checklist provided by Tourism NI. Where there is no existing website a standard pro forma website development plan will be tailored for your business following consultation.

At this stage, if appropriate, you must provide Tourism NI and its consultants with read-only access to your Google Analytics / Google Search Console or similar. These can be installed if not already available.

This is necessary to measure the impact of the developments / improvements that will be made to your website.

Based on the above, Tourism NI's consultants will prepare a Website Development Plan which will detail the developments/improvements that are required for your website. The full cost of the consultant preparing the Website Development Plan will be covered by Tourism NI.

One-to-one support will also be provided by Tourism NI's consultants to help finalise your Website Development Plan. Tourism NI's consultants will sign off each Website Development Plan on its behalf.

Stage 3 - Application for Funding

Following the successful completion of Stage 2, you will be required to submit an online application, in order to apply for funding to implement your Website Development Plan.

Before submitting your application, you must ensure you have uploaded any supporting documentation referenced in the application, your Development Plan along with a proposal and a financial quote, or tender documentation (if applicable) for a suitably qualified professional web consultant (third party supplier) who will implement your Website Development Plan. In seeking quotes/tenders for this work you must adhere to Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy.

The programme is limited in terms of budget to support mentoring costs and necessary capital enhancements. Once your application has been received, it will be scored in line with the following:

- Potential return on investment
- Need for development of / improvement to website.

Following the evaluation process, a Letter of Offer outlining the grant award and conditions of grant will be issued to all successful applicants. The Letter of Offer should be signed within 14 days of receipt. Financial assistance will be subject to budget availability and sufficient expenditure must be incurred by **31 March 2022** to allow draw down of the full grant amount.

Stage 4 - Project Implementation

Once you have signed the Letter of Offer, you can then begin to implement your Website Development Plan through your appointed supplier(s).

Expenditure must be incurred by 31 March 2022.

It is expected that you and your appointed suppliers will liaise closely with Tourism NI and their consultants during implementation. Following implementation of the Website Development Plan, Tourism NI will review the work undertaken 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 Website Development Plan, Tourism NI's consultants will review the analytics of your website and will contact you to get feedback on the impact that the project has had on your business. A final survey will also be undertaken to gather qualitative feedback across such areas as new knowledge acquired in online/digital presence and optimisation; understanding of SEO in general; your ability to make direct changes to your website; and future plans for the development, management and use of your website to promote your business.

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. All expenditure, to allow draw down of grant, must be incurred by **31 March 2022**.

You will be required, at the time of the 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 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 will be available on request.

Procurement

Applicants will be required to adhere to Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy. Failure to adhere 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 <http://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 Co-operation 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 and transparency, consultations, the provision of information and recovery as set out in Articles 369-373.

Full details relating to the TCA can be found at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/982648/TS_8.2021_UK_EU_EAEC_Trade_and_Cooperation_Agreement.pdf

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.

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

8.

About us

Tourism Northern Ireland

Tourism Northern Ireland 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 for projects that seek to achieve economic growth in Northern Ireland.



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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 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.