



Tourist Industry Scheme

Enhancing Visitor Experiences through Immersive Technology (Capital)

Programme Guidelines



tourism
northernireland

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Introduction

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

Tourism NI's ambition is to double the value of Northern Ireland tourism by 2030. This ambitious goal is set in the context of a travel industry which is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world and one which has experienced enormous digital transformation.

Tourism NI wishes to grasp the opportunity presented by this transformation and create new immersive experiences through the use of these enhanced technologies.

Programme Objectives

Tourism NI has, over the last number of years, worked to inspire innovation in the development of visitor experiences across the tourism industry. Significant engagement has taken place to identify interest in and potential to develop existing experiences including the launch of two augmented reality competitions and ongoing discussions across the tourism sector.

This is an outcomes based programme and objectives of the programme are to fund those projects which demonstrate the best prospects of delivering on the outcomes noted herein.

Programme Outcomes

Today's traveller seeks out authenticity and wants an emotional connection with their experience. This programme aims to stimulate new immersive experiences that create a compelling reason for visitors to come to Northern Ireland and to enhance their experience whilst here.

An enhanced and immersive experience can now be delivered through telling our authentic stories in an innovative way by deploying modern technology.

Applicants will, as a minimum, have to demonstrate that there is strong market demand for their attraction which they seek to maintain or grow through an improved or new experience.

Applicants should demonstrate through strong market led evidence how the experience will appeal to their core markets, drive visitation and where appropriate increase dwell time and spend in Northern Ireland. Where appropriate, applicants should also demonstrate how the proposed project might support in extending the tourist season.

Specifically, they must show how the proposed investment will deliver on one or more of the following visitor experience outcomes:

- **Enhanced visibility and accessibility of product (including where appropriate pre-visit and season extension)**
- **Improved visitor experience**
- **Improved storytelling**
- **Improved customer satisfaction**

Applicants must also demonstrate the potential of the project to achieve one or more of the following economic development outcomes:

- **Increased visitor spend**

- **Increased visitor numbers**
- **Increased dwell time**
- **Increased employment opportunities**

Applicants will also be asked to document how the impact of the immersive technology solution will be monitored.



The type of projects we want to support

This programme is outcomes led and, as such, any projects which can demonstrate how they can achieve the outcomes outlined above will be considered. The programme focuses on projects which will have, at their core, an immersive technology solution which allows visitors to enjoy the stories and experiences in a new and immersive manner.

This will include, for example, animation of the Visitor Experience at existing attractions/sites and improvement of interpretation and storytelling so that attractions/sites can tell their story creatively through the utilisation of innovative technology.

What we will not support

As this is a funding programme aimed at delivering immersive visitor experiences through new technologies, the following areas are ineligible for assistance under this programme:

- **Purchase of land**
- **Recoverable VAT**
- **In kind support**
- **Standalone Websites / Mobile / Digital apps - unless part of a wider experience**
- **Public Realm**
- **Retail activities**
- **Events or event centres**
- **Business start-up activities**
- **Marketing, feasibility / technical studies, accreditation programmes, training, festivals, maintenance costs, employee salaries, normal administrative / running costs**
- **Contracts that have already been entered into prior to signing our Letter of Offer, unless they have been overseen by our procurement advisors (Central Procurement Directorate), another Centre of Procurement Excellence or upon review are compatible with Northern Ireland Public Procurement Procedures (NIPPP)**

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



How much financial assistance can I expect?

The minimum amount of funding available under this programme is £25,000 with a maximum of £500,000.

Tourism NI financial assistance will not normally exceed the following thresholds:

1. Private Sector

Financial assistance up to 30% of eligible Project costs.

2. Public Sector

Financial assistance up to 50% of eligible Project costs.

3. Voluntary / Community Sector

Financial assistance up to 50% of eligible Project costs.

This programme falls under the Tourist Industry Scheme which has been registered with the European Commission under the General Block Exemption Regulation which means that specific projects do not need to be notified to the European Commission. However, applicants should note that if an individual provision of support exceeds €500,000 this is reported to the European Commission and the information will be publicly available. Further detail can be found at:

www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/general-block-exemption-regulation

Match Funding

Match funding is required for all projects. At the application stage, all sources of match funding and their associated statuses must be

outlined. The match funding provided must be at a level that ensures the total project costs are realised. Applicants will be required to provide evidence that this match funding is in place prior to an offer being made.

Who can apply?

The categories of eligible bodies are as follows:

Private Sector: Companies and other legal entities and individuals.

Public Sector: Commercial and non-commercial semi state organisations and local authorities.

Voluntary / Community Sector¹: Community and not for profit bodies including companies limited by guarantee.

All applicants must be operational since 1st April 2016.

This is a discretionary programme and we will offer financial assistance only to those projects that will assist in meeting the programme objectives.

The Letter of Offer end date will be 31 March 2019. Applicants must demonstrate that they will have incurred sufficient expenditure by this date to draw down grant.

How can I apply?

The programme will open on 13th November 2018.

All applications for financial assistance will be completed online. Please follow this link to access the application form <https://tni.flexigrant.com>

Please note, if you have previously used Tourism NI's online forms you should use your existing username and password to apply. Hint: Your username is your email address.

If you have any issues, please contact the Capital Funding Team at tds@tourismni.com, select

¹ * Applicants from Voluntary / Community sector will be required to have a Charity No. as evidence that they qualify for this status.

'email us' on the online application portal or phone us on **02890 441601**.

Only applications submitted online to Tourism NI can be accepted.

The closing date for applications is 11am on 3rd December 2018.

Before submitting your application, you must ensure:

- That the application form is fully completed
- You have uploaded any supporting documentation referenced in the application

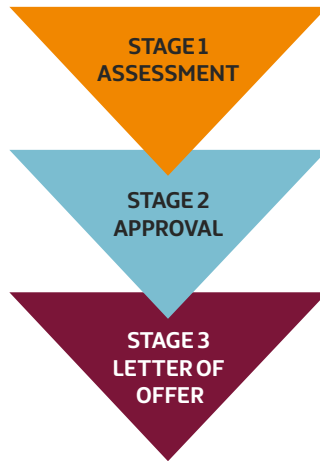
Once you have submitted your application, you must ensure:

- That you have signed your declaration form, available from the submission screen, to validate your application
- The closing date for receipt of the signed declaration form is 5pm on 10 December 2018. It is recommended that the signed form be sent by recorded delivery

Application forms cannot be submitted after 11am on 03 December 2018.



How we will evaluate your application:



Assessment

Once your application has been received, assessment will initially involve an eligibility check. Applications will have to demonstrate that they meet the below eligibility requirements and those which do not, will not be progressed.

- **Financial viability** - The applicant must outline all other sources of match funding to meet total project costs
- **Deliverability** - Applicants must demonstrate that they will have incurred sufficient expenditure by 31 March 2019 to draw down funding under this programme
- **Minimum thresholds** - Applicants must demonstrate eligible grant sought of a minimum of £25,000
- **Operational threshold** - Applicants should be operational since 1st April 2016

Eligible applications will then be scored against the following criteria:

- **Strategic Context** - The application should outline how the project can help support Tourism NI's ambition to double tourism value by 2030 through the development of compelling immersive tourism experiences
 - **Assessment of Need** - The application should clearly define the market opportunity for the proposed project and how it will appeal to international visitors. Applications should specifically demonstrate the following:
 - A clearly identified market (and route to market)
 - The experience gap (and be clear on what the experience will be) and/or
 - The need for an enhancement or refresh to an existing experience
 - **Programme Outcomes** - Applications should outline how the project will deliver against the selected visitor experience and economic outcomes as laid out on page 2 of this document
 - **Financial viability** - Applications must demonstrate how the project will be funded to deliver the end experience and how it will be financially self-sustaining
 - **Project Management** - Applications should outline how the project will be managed to ensure delivery on time, to budget and to quality. Specifically, in reference to Deliverability, applicants must also demonstrate how the project will incur sufficient expenditure to draw down their grant award by 31 March 2019 and a clear plan to support delivery of an experience to visitors by, or before, 31 December 2020
 - **Project promotion and marketing**
 - Applications should outline how the experience will be marketed and provide assurance in relation to any necessary budget required to market it
 - **Innovation and Viability of Technology**
 - Applications should demonstrate the project's use of new immersive technology to animate the visitor experience. Within this detail, applicants should consider showing:
 - how the project utilises innovative methods for visitor engagement; how it adheres to best practice available; how the aptness of the technology ensures a foreseeable life span of 2-3 years
 - **Monitoring** - The application must identify how project outcomes will be monitored and detail the frequency of when this will be carried out. The technology solution should incorporate a means of capturing visitor engagement to include, at minimum, visitor numbers using the proposed experience. Technology solutions should also suggest options for capturing wider intelligence on the visitor, and how this might be deployed and managed, including but not limited to:
 - Visitor profile (please outline details)
 - Capturing the onward journey of the visitor
- Applicants should specify how the proposed solution will be GDPR compliant.
- **Equality and accessibility** - Applications should show how the project will meet the differing needs of Section 75 groups, in addition to ensuring it is accessible to all

Approval

Following the assessment process, the project will be subject to approvals commensurate with the amount of grant sought.

Applicants will be advised of the progress of their application at relevant stages of the assessment process.

Letter of Offer

Successful applicants will be required to sign a Letter of Offer which becomes a legally binding document and they will be required to comply with Government Regulations and conditions surrounding the distribution of Public Funds.

Confirmation that match funding and statutory approvals are in place shall be sought at this stage.

The Letter of Offer must be signed within 28 days of its date of issue otherwise the Offer is void.

Any offer of financial assistance is subject to budget availability.

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. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) requires businesses to pay due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity for the following groups:

- Between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- Between men and women generally
- Between persons with a disability and persons without
- Between persons with dependents and persons without

As outlined under the assessment criteria, you will be required to include within your application how you plan to fulfil the requirements under the Equality of Opportunity and Accessibility Plan for your project.

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

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 will be available on request.

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 Northern Ireland 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.



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.

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