

BUSINESS INNOVATION GRANT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These FAQs should be read in conjunction with the [Guidance Notes](#). The information and evidence required, as outlined in the **Guidance Notes**, are necessary to demonstrate that the business meets the eligibility criteria and to ensure public funds are managed properly.

Please take time to read the Guidance Notes and FAQs carefully before applying.

What is the Business Innovation Grant?

The Business Innovation Grant (BIG) is being launched by Invest NI in partnership with Innovate NI. The scheme is aimed at encouraging businesses that are not currently Invest NI customers to commit to commencing or improving their innovation activities. The innovation support delivered through BIG will also enable businesses to progress along the four stages of the Innovate NI Innovation Framework.

What is the Innovate NI Innovation Framework?

Innovate NI is a Department for the Economy (DfE) initiative delivered by Invest NI in partnership with a range of Northern Ireland innovation stakeholders with the goal of increasing the number of NI businesses engaged in innovation. The Innovate NI Innovation Framework is a four step guide to creating value from your ideas and provides a pathway to implement and commercialise them. Further information on the Framework can be found here [The Innovation Framework | Innovate NI](#)



What does “innovative” mean?

Innovate NI defines innovation as *“the development and implementation of a new or improved product, service, model or process which is novel (significantly different) and has/will be introduced to the market (product or service) or implemented within the business (process, model) creating value”*.

When does the application call open?

The application call will open on **Thursday 14 November 2024 at 12 noon**. The eligibility checker, and on successful completion of this, the application form, will be available at <https://www.innovateni.com/businessinnovationgrant> from this date.

The application call will remain open until **Friday 13 December 2024 at 12 noon**.

Invest NI reserves the right to close the application call early, or extend its opening, based on the volume of applications received. Only applications fully complete and submitted by the time of closing will be considered.

What sort of businesses is BIG aimed at?

BIG is aimed at start-up and established micro, and Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) based in Northern Ireland, with the exclusion of primary agricultural producers, who are primarily concerned with crops, animal production, forestry, logging, fisheries, or aquaculture.

This scheme is aimed at businesses who are not currently Invest NI customers, have not received an offer or payment of grant support from Invest NI within the last five years (not including Covid-19 emergency support measures, Economic Recovery Innovation Grant (ERIG), Innovation Vouchers or Access to Finance funding e.g., Techstart Proof of Concept grant) and do not owe any outstanding liabilities to Invest NI.

Businesses that are involved in innovative activities that align with the [Department for the Economy's Economic Vision](#) and the [Invest NI 2024-27 Business Strategy](#) are also likely to score highly.

How many grants are there?

The number of grant offers issued will depend on the number of applicants that meet or exceed the pass mark as well as budget availability. All applications received will be scored in line with the Assessment Criteria detailed in the [Guidance Notes](#) with applications that meet or exceed the pass mark being ranked from highest to lowest scoring. Following scoring, applications will be awarded based on date of application submitted, subject to Know Your Customer checks.

Can a parent company or business group submit multiple applications for its different business subsidiaries?

No, if you are a business that is part of a group structure with the same ultimate ownership, you may only submit one application across the group.

Can I apply for more than one grant for separate projects within my company?

No, just one application can be accepted per company, so you need to focus on the innovative project with the potential for the greatest return for your business.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**How do I know if my business is eligible to apply for BIG?**

Details on business eligibility and exclusions can be found in the [Guidance Notes](#) and you will be required to complete the online [Eligibility Checker](#) as part of the pre-application process.

The Eligibility Checker will be available from Thursday 14 November 2024 at 12 noon at investni.com/businessinnovationgrant

What do you mean by 'not previously assisted by Invest NI'?

Businesses that have previously received a formal contract or offer of support under any Invest NI scheme (not including Covid-19 emergency support measures, Innovation Vouchers, Economic Recovery Innovation Grant (ERIG) or Access to Finance funding such as Techstart NI Proof of Concept grants) can access an

application form via the Eligibility Checker as long as no Invest NI grant offers or payments have been made to the business within the last five years and subject to all other criteria being met.

What if my business meets all other Criteria but has received Invest NI support within the last five years?

Then you will not be eligible to apply for BIG support. You can contact the Business Support Team on 0800 181 4422 or complete an [Enquiry Form](#) and they can direct you to other relevant sources of assistance.

Do I need to be over 18 to apply for BIG?

There needs to be a Director/Proprietor/Partner aged 18 or over within the business authorised to sign the Letter of Offer contractual agreement. If under 18, they cannot be held liable to the contract with Invest NI.

What does match funding/balance of funding mean?

Invest NI support will make up a proportion of the costs of the innovation project and its proposed activities. Applicants will need to demonstrate that their business will remain cash positive and be able to sustain these new activities. This funding can be from existing cash reserves, loan funding, external investment in the business or future sales and needs to be detailed in the application form. It is not sufficient to assume that Invest NI knows where your funding is coming from; you need to outline in the application how the business will meet its outgoings in the coming years.

Does the business have to be located in Northern Ireland to apply?

Yes, businesses wishing to apply for BIG need to be physically located in Northern Ireland and have at least one Director residing in Northern Ireland. The project seeking support must also be taking place in Northern Ireland.

For businesses with multiple locations, including locations outside Northern Ireland, the overall turnover of the entire business and location of sales (to Northern Ireland based customers or customers from outside Northern Ireland) will be considered when determining eligibility.

The innovation activities for which the company is seeking Invest NI support must relate to the Northern Ireland location.

We would emphasise that this scheme is only open to micro businesses and SMEs.

Can an advisor make an application on behalf of the business?

You can give permission to company contacts to complete the online application. All applications must be authorised in the case of a Limited Company by a Director or the Secretary, and in the case of a Sole Trader or Partnership by a Proprietor or Partner.

We would advise that nobody knows your business better than you do and the application form has been designed to enable an owner or manager to be able to complete it without outside assistance.

You may also wish to review NIBusinessinfo guidance and templates to assist with completion of the form:

www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/plan-and-forecast-sales

www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/business-budgeting

www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/cashflow-forecasts

MAKING AN APPLICATION

How long will it take to complete the form?

The online application process should take approximately two hours to complete if you have all the information to hand e.g. preferred supplier's costs, financial accounts etc. If this information is not immediately available it may take longer, although you can save the application and update it at any time before the application call closes.

In the application we will ask you to outline the current position of your business, what your plans are for the future and what impact Invest NI support will have on making these plans a reality.

Can I save my application and return to it at a later stage?

Yes, you can save a draft of your application and complete later. Saved applications must still be submitted before the application closing date. It is recommended that you save your application on a regular basis to reduce the risk of losing any unsaved work.

How do I submit my application?

You need to click on the 'Submit' button when you have completed your application. If you have any problems submitting your application, please call Invest NI's Business Support Team on 0800 181 4422 for assistance. You will receive a confirmation email when the application has been successfully submitted.

Can I submit my application in a different format?

If you require an application form in an alternative format, please contact equality@investni.com or see our [Equality Statement](#) for further details.

I made an error on my application form. What should I do?

If your form is still saved as Draft, and has not been submitted, then you can go back to the relevant section and update with the correct information.

You will need to click on the 'Submit' button when you have completed the changes to your application.

If you have submitted your application form but require to make changes **before the closing date**, please complete this [enquiry form](#) and a member of Invest NI's Business Support Team will contact you. The Business Support Team can also be contacted by telephone on 0800 181 4422. Your application will be returned for you to update your details.

How do I check on my application progress?

Once your application is submitted it will then be assessed and scored along with all other submitted applications. The outcome of your application will be communicated via email when scoring has been completed.

Do I have to do what I said in my application?

Invest NI is seeking to support businesses that want to commence or develop innovative ideas that are new to your business and/or the market. Each business will outline its plans via the application form, with the top ranked applications being offered support. The success of each engagement will be determined by how the business performs against what it says it will do in the application. This will be requested, via a monitoring form, as part of the claims process.

If a business does not do what it said it will do in the application, the ability to draw down grant money will be impacted. Businesses are encouraged to only apply for support if it is realistic that they will be able to commit to, and achieve, the activities and outcomes outlined in the application.

If my application is successful, when must I complete my project?

All projects must be completed within the project completion date on the Letter of Offer.

PAYMENT**How much grant can I expect to receive?**

Following the application, and subject to successful Know Your Customer checks, each successful business selected will receive a grant offer from a minimum of £5,000 up to a maximum of £20,000 in support. This will be offered via a contract with Invest NI (called a Letter of Offer) and this will include an offer for some of the following eligible costs:

- Consultancy – there is a cap of £700 per day for consultancy costs. Eligible consultancy costs will include:-
 - In Market Research (problem/opportunity validation)
 - In Market Research (Product/Service idea validation)
 - Product/Service market Validation and Testing
 - Innovation management ISO 56000 series audit & training including report production
 - Preparation for market compliance and accreditation
 - Process design and validation
 - Market entry planning including analysis of costs for full product or service development & distribution or implementation
 - Design of market entry strategy.

- Sub-contracting - there is a cap of £700 per day for sub-contracting costs. Eligible consultancy costs will include:-
 - Minimal Viable Product (MVP) development with industry, including market testing

- Trade/development/ test marketing outside NI. Eligible consultancy costs will include:-
 - Identification and establishing of manufacturing and supply chains outside NI
 - New Market Development Visits outside NI
 - Attendance at Trade Fairs and Exhibitions outside NI
 - Product Launches and Demonstrations – including stand rental costs, stand assembly costs (e.g. exhibition stand contractor's fees), stand operating costs (e.g. insurance, electricity, interpreter), exhibition speaking slots, VIP passes, pitch opportunities and/or pre-arranged business-to-business meetings (for maximum of two company representatives)
 - Travel & accommodation costs if outside NI (for maximum of two company representatives).

The actual amount of financial support offered will be dependent on the activities proposed with the application. State Aid guidelines may impact the amount of support available for some applications.

The full conditions associated with the grant will be within a Letter of Offer from Invest NI to the successful businesses. You will need to sign this offer and return to Invest NI prior to commencing any elements of the project.

Support is conditional on the business completing the proposed innovation activities outlined in the application form.

When can I expect to receive the grant payment?

Payment of grant is not up-front and will depend on the execution of specific activities as outlined in any offer of support e.g. completion of innovation activities.

Each successful applicant will receive an offer of support from Invest NI and will then be able to begin incurring spend on activities against which grant money will be paid. When the activity has taken place, the successful applicant can then make a claim to Invest NI. Any activities dated before the Letter of Offer from Invest NI is issued will not be eligible for grant support.

OTHER

What other support is available?

Invest NI has a range of business support measures available to Northern Ireland businesses. You can find more at www.investni.com

My business trading account is a Euro account, can I still apply?

No, you must have a UK Sterling business account to apply for the BIG scheme.

Is the grant awarded on a first come first served basis?

The BIG scheme will be open for applications from 12 noon Thursday, 14 November, 2024 to 12 noon Friday, 13 December 2024.

Funding will be awarded to applicants on a competitive basis. Applications will be assessed and scored, with the highest scoring projects awarded funding following successful completion of Know Your Customer (KYC) checks.

Invest NI reserves the right to close the application call earlier or extend it depending on the volume of applications received. In the case of the application window closing early, only applications submitted on the portal at this time will be considered.

How will I know if my application is successful?

Applicants will be informed via email that their application has been successful. Applicants who are unsuccessful will also be informed via email.

If you have a question that is not covered in the Guidance Notes or Frequently Asked Questions you can contact the Invest NI Business Support Team by completing an [Enquiry Form](#) or by telephone on 0800 181 4422.