The Collaborative Growth & Cluster Programme is the latest iteration of a longer-running programme of similarly focused activity previously called Collaborative Growth Programme (CGP). Its aim is to address a market failure around SME’s ability to collaborate and innovate, and thus generate growth. The new programme will ultimately seek to identify and support up to five Super Clusters, administered over a 10 year period, which will be aligned to Invest NI’s business plan and the Minister’s vision for the economy.

The Collaborative Growth and Clusters Programme.

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Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

Template

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Developing a Policy Strategy Plan

Adopting a Policy Strategy Plan

Implementing a Policy Strategy Plan

Revising a Policy Strategy Plan Designing a Public Service

Delivering a Public Service

 X

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

The Collaborative Growth and Clusters Programme.

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Invest Northern Ireland

1A. Name of Public Authority.

**SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016**

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N/A

*Reasons why a definition of ‘rural’ is not applicable.*

N/A

*Rationale for using alternative definition of ‘rural’.*

N/A

*Details of alternative definition of ‘rural’ used.*

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition). Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of ‘rural’ is not applicable.

 **X**

1F. What definition of ‘rural’ is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

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2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas *differently* from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

 **X**

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

**SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service**

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The proposed Collaborative Growth and Clusters Programme will be open to applicants from anywhere in Northern Ireland and is therefore unlikely to impact people in rural areas in any negative way.

Applications for the proposed programme will be accessed online. This is not expected to negatively impact rural businesses/dwellers as Invest NI delivers many ongoing services in this manner, which are currently being accessed by rural businesses without any issues.

If rural businesses experience any issues accessing online Invest NI resources, they can call our Business Support Team or the Programme Management Team who can provide suitable alternatives, such as hard copy application forms.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

Rural Businesses Rural Tourism Rural Housing

Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas Education or Training in Rural Areas

Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas

Poverty in Rural Areas Deprivation in Rural Areas

Rural Crime or Community Safety Rural Development

Agri-Environment

Other (Please state)

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

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3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders Published Statistics Consultation with Other Organisations Research Papers Surveys or Questionnaires Other Publications

Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

**X**

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

**SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas**

The Programme is not aimed at any specific geographical areas, but rather at representatives of NI Industry (including start-ups, entrepreneurs, academia, public sector, stakeholders, VC’s etc) who wish to collaborate on specific projects with defined economic outcomes. Therefore, representatives from any of these groups, regardless of their location in Northern Ireland, are welcome to apply to participate in Networks/Clusters funded under the Programme (provided that the projects that they are aligned to meet Invest NI’s general intervention principles).

With the above in mind, **no** actions were taken to identify additional social and economic needs beyond those established in RNIA guidance. However, we considered the following:

* Is appropriate infrastructure in place to enable businesses/ dwellers in rural areas to access the service**? Yes, currently many rural based people and businesses successfully access INI support already.**
* Will people in more remote rural areas be able to access the service? **Yes**
* Could it cost people in rural areas disproportionately more to access the service**? No**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who rely on public transport services? **No**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who don’t have access to high quality broadband? **No as we will offer alternative means of application if required.**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas whose access to mobile communications is variable or limited in areas**? No as we will offer alternative means of application if required.**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people operating businesses in rural areas**? No**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who have to travel longer distances to avail of employment opportunities**? No**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who require access to childcare facilities? **No**
* Will the policy, strategy, plan or public service affect certain groups of people in rural areas disproportionally e.g. seasonal workers, farmers and farm families or older people, younger people or people with disabilities who do not have access to transport? **No**
* Are there pockets of hidden poverty or deprivation within rural areas which need to be taken account of in determining the effects of the policy, strategy, plan or public service on people in rural areas? **No**.

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3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

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**Consideration given to the Application Process:**

As outlined in Section 3E, The Collaborative Growth and Clusters Programme will be accessible to all businesses in urban and rural areas and applications will be submitted online.

**Consideration given to Eligibility Criteria:**

The Programme has been designed for representatives of NI Industry (including start-ups, entrepreneurs, academia, public sector, stakeholders, VC’s etc) who wish to collaborate on specific projects with defined economic outcomes. Therefore, representatives from any of these groups, regardless of their location in Northern Ireland, are welcome to apply to participate in Networks/Clusters funded under the Programme (provided that the projects that they are aligned to meet Invest NI’s general intervention principles).

**Consideration given to Financial Assistance:**

1. The grant offered to eligible Networks and Clusters will be used for Facilitator/Cluster Manager costs however such costs will be more influenced by sector/experience in delivering similar projects rather than by location.
2. The amount of grant offered to each Network/Cluster will be the same regardless of geographical location.
3. The rate of Grant offered to each Network/ Cluster will be the same regardless of geographical location.

**Consideration given to the promotion of the Programme:**

The Programme will be promoted through Invest NI social media channels, our Regional Offices, our partnerships and key stakeholder engagement across NI including the 11 Councils.

**Consideration given to monitoring:**

The programme will have a mid-point evaluation carried out in 2027 and a full evaluation in 2034. During the evaluation process, levels of participation across NI will be assessed and feedback from participants will be provided.

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

**SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas**

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If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

Yes No If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.

**X**

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

**SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service**

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Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:

Nicola McCloskey

Position/Grade:

Collaborative Growth Executive - DP

Division/Branch

Skills & Competitiveness Division

Signature:

Nicola McCloskey

Date:

29 May 2024

Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:

Pamela Marron

Position/Grade:

Equality Manager

Division/Branch:

PCC Division

Signature:

Pamela Marron

Date:

18th June 2024

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

X

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

**SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording**

The Collaborative Growth & Clusters Programme was designed to address an NI-wide market failure around SME’s ability to collaborate and innovate, and thus generate growth. While the programme will have some benefits to rural businesses and people, it was not created for the sole benefit or needs of rural dwellers.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.