



## COVID-19 PROCESS & ORGANISATIONAL IMPROVEMENT GRANT

### GUIDANCE NOTES

This document provides guidance on the COVID-19 Process & Organisational Improvement Grant (POIG) including eligibility criteria, application process and information required. If you are considering applying for POIG, please read this document carefully before submitting an application.

#### OVERVIEW

Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) has launched a new grant scheme to support businesses to investigate and implement a range of potential improvements to help address the impact COVID-19 is having on their operations.

**The programme will provide grant support to eligible companies to help them build internal teams, and engage consultants as needed, to develop and implement process and organisation improvements.**

**The maximum level of grant support will be £50k for small and medium size companies and £200k for large companies.**

POIG is managed and administered by Invest NI.

**Please note this is a two-part application process.**

Pre-application eligibility check and enquiry must be completed by 12 noon on the 21st of May 2021.

If eligible you will be sent an application form which must be submitted by the deadline of 12 noon on Wednesday 26 May 2021.

Funding will be awarded to applicants on a competitive basis. Applications will be assessed and scored, with the highest scoring companies awarded funding, until the available funding budget for this call has been fully allocated or the minimum criterion score is reached.



## ELIGIBILITY

Existing Invest NI customers, or [businesses that can become an Invest NI customer](#), can apply for POIG.

POIG is open to any business operating in one of the following [Standard Industrial Classification \(SIC\)](#) sectors:

- manufacturing
- construction
- information and communication
- professional, scientific and technical activities

Businesses must meet **all** of the following criteria:

- The business operation is based in Northern Ireland.
- Have an annual turnover of at least £500,000 in one of the three most recent financial years.
- Have a project which will investigate process and organisation improvements using digital technologies.
- Projects must have minimum eligible costs of £40,000.
- Internal staff costs must be at least 20% of overall eligible project costs.
- Be able to implement and complete the project, with all expenditure incurred prior to 28 February 2022.
- Be able to submit quarterly claims to Invest NI if required, with a final claim date of 15 March 2022.

If you are a business, which is part of a group structure with the same ultimate ownership, you can only submit one application across the group.

Note: If a large company will exceed its De Minimis allowance as a result of support under this scheme, please contact Invest NI to explore if there are other support options available.

## Exclusions

The following are not eligible to apply:

- Businesses already in receipt of or intending to gain other government support for the project.
- Businesses that do not provide commercial products and/or services.
- Businesses that cannot demonstrate they are a viable business.
- Applications which include or relate to activities that Invest Northern Ireland considers as ineligible or as involving an unacceptable reputational risk, such as gambling, tobacco products and cannabis-based products, which are not authorised as medicines.



## ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

The project must support the business to work in a new way and help it towards industry 4.0. Eligible projects should focus on investigating and implementing new digital technologies, such as automation, robotics or digitisation, which will result in process and organisation improvements for the company.

Eligible projects must have minimum labour (internal staff) or consultancy costs of £40,000, of which internal staff costs must be at least 20%. The internal team must be specifically involved in investigating new and different technologies to help the business change operations; and to then implement these new process and organisation improvements.

Eligible costs include:

- Salary costs of existing staff required to work on the project.
- Consultant costs to provide expert advice to support the delivery of the project.

The following costs are not eligible:

- Any costs of any new instrument, equipment, building or land.
- Additional overheads and other operating costs incurred directly as a result of the project, including costs of materials, supplies and similar products, travel, attendance at shows/events.

## TIMESCALES

POIG is now open via a competitive call for applications. **Pre-application eligibility check and enquiry must be completed by 12 noon on the 21st of May 2021. If eligible you will be sent an application form which must be submitted by the deadline of 12 noon on Wednesday 26 May 2021.**

Unfortunately we will not be able to accept late applications so you are encouraged to submit as early as possible.

As this is a competitive call, please take note of the Assessment Process detailed in this document and ensure you read and check your application form before submitting. Corrections or additional information provided after the closing date will not be accepted.



## HOW TO APPLY

Your first step is to [check if you are eligible](#) to apply for POIG.

If you meet the eligibility criteria, you will need to complete an online pre-application form.

You will need to provide the following details in your pre-application:

- Your business name.
- Your contact name, telephone number and email address.
- Your business address and postcode.
- The date you established your business in Northern Ireland.
- Number of people you employ in Northern Ireland.
- The financial year end, annual turnover and balance sheet total of your business.
- Your company registration number (if applicable) issued by Companies House, beginning with NI followed by six numbers, for example NI123456.
- Impact on your business if the project does not receive grant support.
- Details of the project with objectives, costs, milestones and risks.

The POIG Team will then contact you within three working days to discuss the project in more depth, answer any questions and to release an application form.

Once the application form is released, as part of the full application process, you will also need to provide electronically:

- Signed company accounts to verify your business has a turnover of at least £500,000 in one of your three most recent financial years.
- Most recent annual or audited accounts, together with the most recent management accounts.
- Excel costs sheet detailing project costs, this must include a breakdown of labour cost (internal and consultant).

Please note the maximum file size of each attached document is 20MB.

The application form should take approximately 1 to 2 hours to complete.

You can save your application and return to it at any time, prior to the closing date of 12 noon on Wednesday 26th May 2021. You will need to click on the **'Submit'** button when you have completed your application.



## ASSESSING YOUR APPLICATION

Your project will be assessed based on the information you provide in your application form.

**The pre-application eligibility check and enquiry must be completed by 12 noon on the 21st of May 2021. If eligible you will be sent an application form which must be submitted by the deadline of 12 noon on the 26th of May 2021.**

Your application will first be checked against the POIG eligibility criteria. If eligible, an Invest NI Assessment Panel will then evaluate your application against the following assessment criteria.

Assessment Criteria	Maximum Score
1. Demonstrate that the proposed digital solutions and technologies will help the business change operations and how the implementation of these ideas will impact on long term productivity.	35
2. Ability of the designated internal project team and/or external consultancy to deliver the project successfully.	25
3. Track record of the business and demonstrating the ability to deliver the project successfully.	20
4. Quality of the proposal and information provided.	20

It is important you consider the assessment criteria and ensure your application clearly articulates how you plan to deliver the project and include relevant achievable outcomes and outputs to achieve the highest possible score.

### Assessment process

To be considered for funding, your application must achieve a minimum overall score of 60 and at least 60% in each criterion. Any application that does not meet this threshold will be deemed ineligible for funding.

Where two or more applications have the same overall score:

- the higher score in Criteria 1 will be given priority;
- if scores are still equal, the higher score in Criteria 2 will be given priority; and
- if scores are still equal, the higher score in Criteria 3 will be given priority; and
- if scores are still equal, the higher score in Criteria 4 will be given priority.



Following the assessment process, eligible applications will be ranked in order of the highest to lowest score.

Funding will be awarded to applications in order of ranking until the available funding budget is fully allocated. Please note that, even if an application is deemed eligible this is not a guarantee of funding as all funding could be allocated before reaching lower ranked applications.

If at the end of this process not all of the available funding budget has been allocated, Invest NI may decide to run another call for applications at a future date.

## **NOTIFICATION OF FUNDING DECISION**

A final decision may take up to three weeks after the closing date of 12 noon on Wednesday 26th of May 2021.

Please do not start your project or incur cost until you receive a Letter of Offer for your project from Invest NI. If you incur costs because you have signed contracts, given permission to start work, raised invoices or made payments before you have received an Invest NI Letter of Offer, these costs cannot be claimed for and could prevent you from accessing any of the grant funding awarded.

Once an application is approved, applicants are informed and a Letter of Offer will be issued.

Unsuccessful applicants will also be informed via email.

## **Appeals Procedure**

The Invest NI Assessment Panel will determine at its sole discretion:

- Whether sufficient information has been provided to assess an application.
- The score awarded against each assessment criteria.
- Whether an application has been successful.
- The amount and terms of funding awarded.

As this is a competition additional supporting information cannot be accepted after the closing date.

If you have any enquiries about your application, please complete this [enquiry form](#)

## **SUBMITTING A CLAIM**

Companies should submit a completed claim form, with supporting invoices to enable payment against vouched and approved expenditure. Claims should be supported by:



- an invoice from the consultant supplier(s) to the company and;
- proof that payment has been made, such as a bank statement.
- A spreadsheet showing internal labour hours against named employee/s.

Companies may incur expenditure under POIG up until 28 February 2022 with a final claim date of 15 March 2022.

The POIG team will be available to provide guidance on the claims process should you require it.

## **YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES**

You are responsible for providing accurate and true information on your application.

The provision of wrong or misleading information is an offence and any such information may be used against you in any subsequent criminal investigation.

The information provided on this application form may be made available to other departments or agencies for the purposes of preventing or detecting crime.

## **DATA PROTECTION AND HANDLING**

POIG is managed and administered by Invest NI who will have access to the information you provide as part of your application; both as a means to assess your eligibility and to conduct any post scheme governance assessments.

As this financial support is sourced from public funds Invest NI will, in the interest of openness and transparency, proactively publish limited information on the fund including:

- name of applicant
- application title
- amount of assistance

Invest NI will handle your data in compliance with applicable laws including the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. For further details on our data handling practices please see the [Invest NI Privacy Notice](#)

## **Automated decision-making**

Automated decisions, based on responses to the online eligibility checker, will be carried out to assess the eligibility of an applicant to submit a pre-application form.

We request that you ensure you select your responses carefully and accurately.



Applicants have the option to access a human review of an automated decision if they feel an automated decision has been wrongly made based on the information provided. To request a review on this basis please [contact us](#).

## STATE AID

Depending on the company size grant funding is being provided either:

- Under [General Block Exemption Regulation \(GBER\)](#), 2014, Article 29, or
- [De Minimis Aid](#). De minimis aid describes small amounts of public funding to business that has a negligible impact on trade and competition. A single company can receive up to €200,000 de minimis aid over three consecutive fiscal years.

The following maximum rates of support will be available:

Company Size	Maximum Support Rate
Small	50%
Medium	50%
Large	50% via De Minimis *

For the purposes of this scheme small and medium sized businesses are defined as per the [European Commission definition](#).

\* If a large company will exceed its De Minimis allowance as a result of support under this scheme, please contact Invest NI to explore if there are other support options available.

## GENERAL ENQUIRIES

If you have any enquiries about the COVID-19 Process & Organisational Grant please complete this [enquiry form](#).

For general enquiries, please contact Invest NI's Business Support Team on 0800 181 4422. Lines are open Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 4.30pm.