

Local Innovation Partnerships Fund – Guidance Notes for Earmarked Strand

The Local Innovation Partnerships Fund (LIPF) is a new £500 million UKRI-led programme which covers the period 2026 to 2031. It empowers innovation leadership through local ‘triple helix’ partnerships between civic institutions, business and universities, delivering impact, at scale.

The LIPF will support the development and scaling of high-potential innovation clusters across the UK. It is designed to support both established clusters with a proven track record of innovation, and emerging clusters that are in earlier stages of development but have significant potential to generate economic value.

There is up to £500m available through two funding strands: an earmarked strand and a competed strand. Further information on the Fund can be accessed on UKRI’s website at <https://www.ukri.org/publications/local-innovation-partnerships-fund-guidance/>

At least £30 million of funding has been guaranteed for Northern Ireland via the fund’s earmarked strand which is focused on a corridor covering Belfast and Derry-Londonderry. Guidance on the earmarked strand can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/local-innovation-partnerships-fund-earmarked-strand/>

In parallel, there is a competitive funding opportunity with up to £20 million per place available for high-potential innovation clusters not covered by an earmarked award. Guidance on the competed strand can be accessed at the following link <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/local-innovation-partnerships-fund/>

The Department for the Economy is working collaboratively with UKRI and Invest NI on the earmarked strand for Northern Ireland’s Innovation Corridor. The competed strand is a separate open funding call which is run by UKRI. Eligible applicants should apply directly to UKRI for this strand.

Earmarked Strand – Northern Ireland’s Innovation Corridor

At least £30 million has been allocated to Northern Ireland to support cluster(s) in the Belfast-Derry/Londonderry Innovation Corridor. This is a £30million award over a five-year period. Eligible activities for funding can be found in UKRI’s guidance note.

The first part of the LIPF process is to develop a readiness check in line with UKRI processes. The readiness check will outline which cluster/clusters the Belfast-Derry/Londonderry Innovation Corridor will focus on. The development of the readiness check will be facilitated by the Department for the Economy. The decision on the cluster(s) of focus will be undertaken by an expert-led Innovation Panel, based on a number of criteria, in line with the guidance published by UKRI.

The ability to robustly demonstrate private sector match funding will be a critical factor in determining the cluster(s) of focus for the corridor. Please see more information on match funding requirements below.

Process for Applications – Earmarked Strand

Requirements from UKRI

As part of the application process for the earmarked strand of this fund, regions will be asked to first submit a readiness check and later submit a portfolio of projects for assessment by an independent panel, in line with standard UKRI processes. There will **only be one** readiness check and one subsequent portfolio submission prepared for UKRI assessment for the earmarked strand.

UKRI has agreed that the Department for the Economy will oversee the submission process for the Belfast-Derry/Londonderry Innovation Corridor.

Local Decision Making

There will be a two-stage process:

- Stage One (current stage) – An expression of interest exercise to determine the cluster(s) the Belfast-Derry/Londonderry Innovation Corridor will focus on. This information will be used to shape the region's readiness check submission for UKRI by 3 February 2026 (wave 2 deadline)
- Stage Two – The development of a cluster-focused project portfolio for submission to UKRI by 5 May 2026 (wave 2 deadline) for assessment.

The Department for the Economy, working with Invest NI, UKRI and a new expert-led LIPF Innovation Panel, will oversee the readiness check submission for the Belfast to Derry/Londonderry Innovation Corridor for the guaranteed £30m earmarked award.

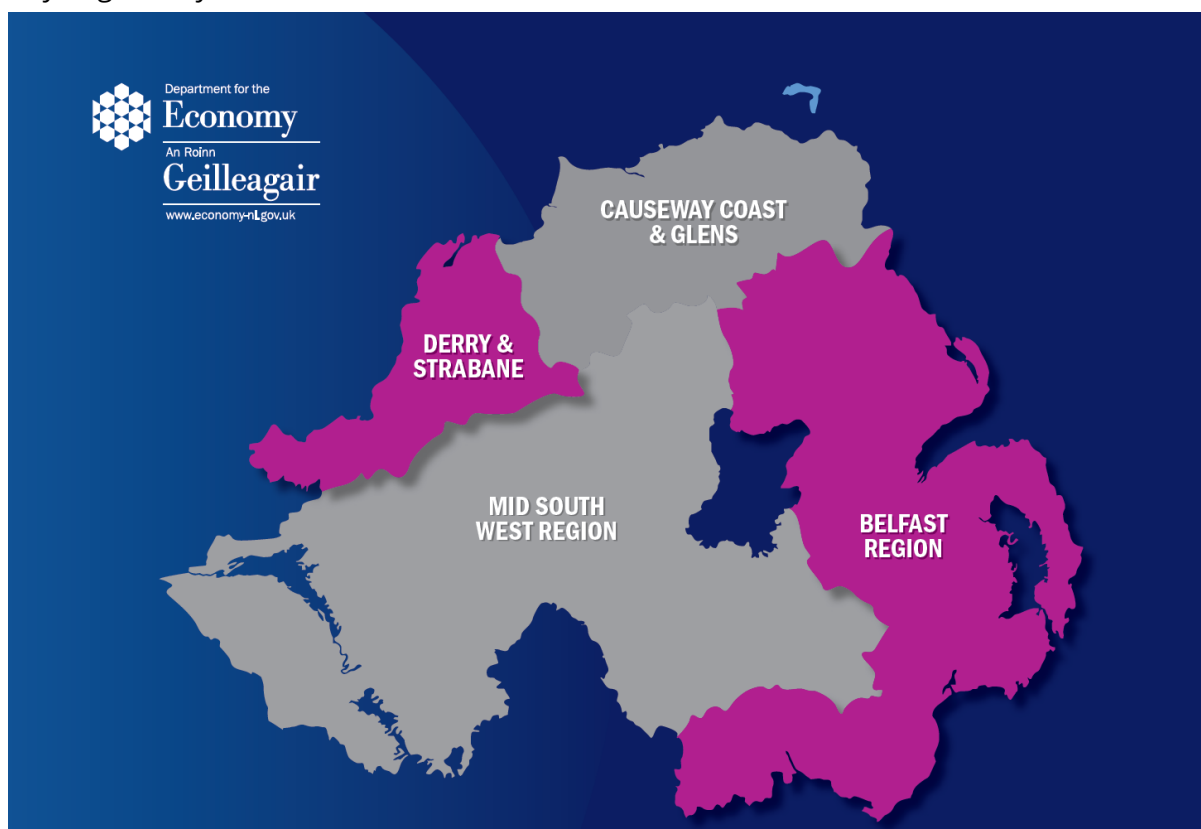
The process, timelines and further details will be updated on the NI Business Info site as development of the programme continues and will be coordinated at a local level.

Belfast- Derry/Londonderry Innovation Corridor

The Belfast – Derry/Londonderry Innovation Corridor is defined as below:

- Those areas that are located within the Belfast Region City Deal and the Derry~Londonderry & Strabane City Region City Deal as shown in figure 1.
- Clusters based within these regions are able to invite membership from organisations outside of the Corridor as long as they can demonstrate that the benefit and impact will be for the cluster within the Corridor.

Figure 1 – Areas included in Belfast Region City Deal and Derry~Londonderry & Strabane City Region City Deal boundaries



Selection Process

Through co-creation with UKRI, regions are asked to identify and assemble a compelling portfolio of activities that draw upon local research and innovation strengths and support the high-potential ‘innovation clusters’ identified within their region, empowering innovation leadership and delivering impact, at scale.

An expert-led Innovation Panel will be established for Northern Ireland’s Innovation Corridor with representatives from across the innovation ecosystem. The Panel will decide what the cluster(s) of focus will be for the Belfast-Derry/Londonderry Innovation Corridor for the earmarked award and oversee the readiness check submission to UKRI.

The Panel will be asked to declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest which may arise in the course of their duties. This ensures that all decisions taken by the Panel are impartial, transparent, and compliant with the Nolan Principles of Public Life — selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.

Stage One – Expressions of Interest

Interested and eligible clusters are invited to submit an expression of interest that outlines a proposition for the Belfast-Derry/Londonderry Innovation Corridor and includes high level details of what a project portfolio may look like under this cluster.

The expression of interest is now live and the deadline for submitting an expression of interest is **4pm on 3 December 2025**.

When submitting an EOI clusters should note that the Department for the Economy and the Innovation Panel may choose to request further information or seek further evidence from applicants as part of their assessment of the expressions of interest and subsequent preparation of the submission of the readiness check for UKRI.

The expression of interest form is available on the NI Business Info site and can also be made available by requesting a copy from DfE's LIPF Team via innovationfunding@economy-ni.gov.uk.

Stage Two – Call for Projects

A local call for projects seeking funding will be issued in 2026 which will inform the development of the project portfolio submission within the agreed cluster(s) for the Belfast-Derry/ Londonderry Innovation Corridor. The project portfolio will be submitted to UKRI by 5 May 2026 and will undergo the standard UKRI assessment process.

Match funding

LIPF Funding, provided through UKRI, has match funding requirements. Partnerships submitting expressions of interest under stage one of the process will be expected to robustly demonstrate evidence of match funding. In stage two, as part of applications for project funding, applicants will be expected to provide a proportion of the total eligible project costs. Across the £30m of investment UKRI will need to see that the portfolio of activities (not individual projects) can generate an absolute minimum private to public investment ratio of 1:1 during the delivery phase and 2:1 across the portfolio's lifespan (7-year reporting period - 5 years of the programme plus 2 further years reporting period). Ideally projects should demonstrate how they could deliver a ratio of 3:1 over the lifespan.

The focus on leveraging private sector activity from the LIPF is particularly important in the longer-term, even if it cannot be achieved out the outset of projects. UKRI has confirmed that 'in kind' funding is not considered eligible.

Evidence of ability to match fund is considered critical. Applicants should note that expressions of interest should be able to provide detail and clarity on how match funding will be delivered.

Further Information

For further information, you can contact:

The Department for the Economy LIPF Team at innovationfunding@economy-ni.gov.uk

The UKRI Place Team at place@ukri.org