

COVID-19 MICRO-BUSINESS E-COMMERCE GRANT GUIDANCE NOTES

This document provides guidance on the COVID-19 Micro-business E-commerce Grant including eligibility criteria, application process and evidence required. If you are considering applying for this grant please read this document carefully before submitting an application.

OVERVIEW

Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) has launched a new £3 million fund to help retail micro-businesses in Northern Ireland looking to grow their business online.

The COVID-19 Micro-business E-commerce Grant is open to any [micro-sized](#) retailer that wants to prepare for growth, develop their customer base and find new markets by enhancing their digital offering, building e-commerce capability and increasing online sales.

Businesses can access a maximum grant of £5,000 to support 80% of eligible costs. (Projects must have a minimum of £1,250 of eligible expenditure.)

The Micro-business E-commerce Grant is managed and administered by Invest NI.

ELIGIBILITY

As micro-sized retailer, you are eligible if:

- Your business operation is based in Northern Ireland.
- You are a [micro-sized](#) business, trading at least two years and employing less than 10 full-time equivalent staff in Northern Ireland.
- Your business has physical, retail premises in NI (e.g. high street shop, sales/trade counter, etc).
- If your business is not exclusively retail then more than 50% of your turnover must come from the retail part of your business (i.e. you are not primarily a manufacturer or producer, etc).
- Your business has an existing online presence such as a basic business website, online marketplace or social media channels.
- Your business has a physical product, or a range of physical products, that can be sold online and shipped to customers.

- Your project is not receiving any other public funding such as government or European Union funding.
- You are able to complete your project, pay your supplier and make a claim within the next 6 months.

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.

Exclusions

The following are examples of businesses that are not eligible to apply:

- Businesses that cannot demonstrate they have a viable and profitable operation.
- Businesses involved in the primary production of agricultural products, fisheries and aquaculture.
- Businesses providing hospitality and leisure services such as hotels, pubs, cafes and restaurants.
- Businesses primarily involved in the provision of a service such as travel agents, mechanics and tyre fitting services, grooming and beauty services, hair salons, tattoo artists, funeral directors, medical, dental and veterinary practices, accountancy, legal and financial services and insurance broker services.
- Franchisees of retailers for whom the franchisor provides material online support such as online marketing or e-commerce expertise.
- Businesses involved in activities that Invest NI considers as ineligible or as involving an unacceptable reputational risk, such as gambling, adult entertainment, tobacco products and cannabis-based products, which are not, authorised as medicines.

Eligible activities

Eligible activities include the services of a supplier(s) providing expertise to:

- Review current digital marketing capabilities and online sales channels.
- Develop a digital marketing / e-commerce strategy to drive sustainable growth in online sales.

- Implement an enhanced online e-commerce system or improvements to your existing e-commerce solution for the business.
- In-house training and knowledge transfer to develop the digital marketing and e-commerce capability of the employees for the business.
- Improve integration and automation with existing e-commerce systems.

The following are examples of activities/costs **not** covered:

- Upgrades to existing online channels that would happen anyway or could be considered business as usual.
- The purchase of computer hardware and equipment, and software licences and subscriptions.
- Pay-per-click or display advertising costs for online advertising on platforms such as Google, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, or purchasing mailing or membership lists.
- Offline marketing costs
- External training course fees
- Any costs from related parties
- In-house costs such as wages/salaries
- VAT

TIMESCALES

The Micro-business e-commerce grant is now open via an open call for applications.

The call for applications will close at 6pm on 12th March 2021.

If demand exceeds the budget available funding will be allocated on a “first come first served basis” and the call for applications may be closed earlier than the planned deadline above.

Please read and check your application form before submitting as 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 the Micro-business E-commerce Grant by completing the [eligibility checker](#).

The online application process takes approximately one hour to complete. If you meet the eligibility criteria, you will need the following information to complete the online application form.

- Your business name.
- Your contact name, email and phone number.
- 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 of your business.
- The annual turnover of your business.
- The balance sheet total of your business.
- Annual accounts and financial position including offline and online sales.
- Details of the project with costs, tasks/work to be completed and timelines of when the work is to be started and completed.
- Your company registration number (if applicable) issued by Companies House, beginning with NI followed by six numbers, for example NI123456.
- Details of any De Minimis funding your business (if applicable) has received in the current or previous two fiscal (accounting) years.

You will also need to provide three types of documents electronically:

- A valid form of Photographic ID as proof of your identity, such as a scanned or photograph copy of a valid passport or a current (full or provisional) driving licence. All driving licences with an expiry date between 1 February and 31 August 2020 will be treated as valid for a further seven months;
- A scanned or photograph copy of proof of the business address such as a bank statement dated within the last three months for an account used by your business that clearly shows the address;
- A supplier quotation(s) for all the project costs included in the application form. The costs should be itemised and sufficiently descriptive to allow us to determine which costs are eligible. To get best value for money you are expected to shop around and get quotes from other potential suppliers with a track record of delivering similar services but please only attach the preferred supplier quotation(s).

*If there are any queries over value for money we may ask for your alternative supplier quote(s). Advice on selecting IT providers is available of nibusinessinfo.co.uk

Submitted costs may be reduced or disallowed where, in Invest NI's view, they do not appear to offer good value for money or are outside the typical market rates for comparable services.

To attach documents to your application, please click the '**Attach Documents**' button at the relevant section of the online application form. You will need to provide a description of the document to identify the document provided. Please note the maximum size of each attachment is 20MB.

The online application process should take approximately one hour, providing you have all the necessary information available.

You can save your application and return to it at any time, prior to the closing date of 6pm on 12th March 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 and the associated attachments requested.

It is important you ensure your application clearly describes how you plan to deliver the project, the planned work/tasks with itemised costs and include details of relevant achievable outcomes and outputs you expect the project to bring.

Assessment process

The project must align with the objectives of Micro-business e-commerce grant and aimed at helping you to grow sales. Applications will be assessed and funding will be awarded to applicants that have clearly demonstrated they meet the criteria and project costs are considered eligible by Invest NI.

A maximum grant support of £5,000 at up to 80% of eligible costs is available for projects that are successful. Minimum project costs are £1,250 of eligible costs.

Notification of funding decision

A final decision may take up to 4 weeks from the date you submitted a fully completed application. Decisions will take longer if the information provided on your application is incomplete or unclear.

Please do not start the project, incur costs or pay deposits until you receive written confirmation of funding from Invest NI. If you incur costs because you have signed contracts, given permission to start work, raised invoices or made payments **before** funding is approved, these costs cannot be claimed for and could prevent you from accessing any of the funding awarded.

Once an application is approved, applicants will be informed via email that their application has been successful.

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.
- Whether an application has been successful.
- The amount and terms of funding awarded.

As this is a time limited call for applications, additional supporting information cannot be accepted after the closing date.

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

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.

If you already have a MyINI portal account, please log in with your existing credentials. If you do not have an account on the application portal you need to register using an email address and a password. You will then be able to complete the online application.

DATA PROTECTION AND HANDLING

The Micro-business e-commerce grant 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



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E-commerce Grant for Retail Businesses**
Up to £5k for micro retail businesses to grow their online sales.



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- 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](#).

STATE AID

The Micro-business e-commerce grant must not result in the business exceeding its applicable State Aid de minimis ceiling in the last three years.

The grant constitutes de minimis aid that falls within the scope of the EC's de minimis Regulation. The maximum amount of de minimis aid a company can receive in a three year period as indicated is €200,000. If this grant results in a breach of this ceiling or there is any contravention of de minimis or other State Aid rules, irrespective of whether this was a deliberate or otherwise deception or error or as a result of any misleading statements given on the application, this grant will be recoverable in full and may be subject to legal action.

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

If you have any enquiries about the COVID-19 Micro-business E-commerce Grant 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.