



COVID-19 DIGITAL SELLING CAPABILITY GRANT

Third call for applications

GUIDANCE NOTES

This document provides guidance for the third call for applications to the COVID-19 Digital Selling Capability Grant (DSCG). It covers eligibility criteria, application process and supporting information required. If you are considering applying for DSCG, please read this document carefully before submitting an application.

OVERVIEW

The scheme, developed by Invest Northern Ireland, will help established retail and wholesale businesses in Northern Ireland to grow their business online. This third call for applications is open to any small or medium sized retailer or wholesaler, trading at least two years, with 5 employees or more. The business must have an existing online presence and want to enhance its digital offering to expand its customer base, improve e-commerce capability and increase online sales.

Businesses can access a maximum grant of £20,000 to support 50% of eligible costs for projects with a minimum eligible expenditure of £10,000

ELIGIBILITY

As a small or medium sized retailer or wholesaler, you are eligible if:

- Your business operation is based in Northern Ireland and trading at least 2 years.
- You are a small or medium sized business, trading at least two years, employing 5 or more full-time equivalent staff in Northern Ireland.
- You are a retail or wholesale business which has a physical retail or wholesale premises in Northern Ireland, accessible to the public.
- Where your business turnover includes income from sources other than your retail or wholesale premises, more than 50% of your total turnover/sales/revenue must be from your retail/wholesale operation (i.e. you are NOT primarily a manufacturer, producer, engineering or services business, etc.)
- Your business has an existing online presence such as a business website 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.
- In either the current or previous two financial years, more than 50% of your revenue has come from offline sales instead of online sales.
- Your project is not receiving any other public funding, such as government or European Union funding.
- You are able to deliver your project, pay the costs in full to your supplier(s) and submit your claim to Invest NI before 28th February 2022.



Please note, if you are a business, which is part of a group structure or has the same ultimate ownership, you can only submit one application across the group of businesses.

When evaluating if a business is a [small or medium sized](#) business, Invest NI will consider the group structure as a whole, including the resources of all companies where there is common ownership.

EXCLUSIONS

The following businesses 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 who cannot provide supporting evidence that more than 50% of total turnover/sales/revenue is from the retail/wholesale operation.
- Businesses involved in the provision of a service such as travel agents, estate agents, photographers, delivery services, 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

Projects must have a minimum eligible expenditure of £10,000. Eligible activities include the services of a supplier(s) providing expertise to:

- Carry out best practice research to identify relevant benchmarks.
- Review current digital marketing capabilities and online sales channels.
- Develop a digital marketing strategy to maximise online presence.
- Develop an 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 activities are 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, software licences, hosting charges 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.
- Consultancy and/or supplier costs from related parties.



TIMESCALES

DSCG is now open via a competitive call for applications.

The call for applications will close at 5pm on 15th October 2021.

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 DSCG.

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 and 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.
- Last 2 years Annual accounts information and headline financial projections including turnover, employee numbers, offline and online sales.
- Details of the project with costs, tasks and timelines.
- Your company registration number (if applicable) issued by Companies House, beginning with NI followed by six numbers, for example NI123456.

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. In the case of a Limited Company, this must be for a registered Director;
- A scanned or photograph copy of proof of the business address such as a bank statement or utility bill 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. You will need to provide a description of the document to identify the document provided. Please note the maximum size of each attachment is 10MB.

Attachments should be in either PDF, PNG, JPG or JPEG format.

Completing the online application 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 5pm on Friday 15th October 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 must be submitted before the closing deadline of 5pm on Friday 15th October 2021.

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

Assessment Criteria	Maximum Score
1. Proposed impact the project will have on future sales (in Northern Ireland and in external markets) and the viability of the business.	40
2. Track record of the business and demonstrating the ability to deliver the project successfully.	40
3. 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 gain the highest possible score.



ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Applications will be assessed and ranked in order of the highest to lowest score.

To be approved for funding, your application must achieve a minimum score of 60. Where two or more applications have the same score:

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

Funding will be awarded to applicants that have achieved the minimum score of 60 until the available budget is fully allocated, ranked in order of the highest to lowest score.

A maximum grant of £20,000 to support 50% of eligible costs is available for projects with a minimum eligible expenditure of £10,000.

NOTIFICATION OF FUNDING DECISION

A final decision may take up to four weeks from the closing date of 5pm on Friday 15th October 2021.

Please do not start the project, incur cost 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.
- The score awarded against each assessment criteria.
- Whether an application has been successful.
- The amount and terms of funding awarded.

As this is a competitive call for applications, additional supporting information cannot be accepted after the closing date of 5pm on Friday 15th October 2021.

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.

DATA PROTECTION AND HANDLING

DSCG 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](#).

STATE AID

DSCG support is provided under the [General Block Exemption Regulation \(GBER\)](#) Aid for consultancy in favour of SMEs: Article 18. Aid can be provided for up to 50% for the eligible costs of services provided by external consultants.

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

Please also review the DSCG [frequently asked questions](#).

If you have any enquiries about the COVID-19 Digital Selling Capability 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 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 3:30pm.