



## INTRODUCTION

This document provides guidance on the Economic Recovery Innovation Grant (ERIG) including eligibility criteria, application process and information required to apply. If you are considering applying for ERIG, please read this document carefully before submitting an application.

## OVERVIEW

Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) has launched a new grant scheme to support local businesses to develop innovative projects and to encourage businesses to progress along [Innovate NI's Innovation Framework](#).

ERIG is has now been extended for applications. Projects will be appraised on a first-come first served basis. Invest NI reserves the right to close the grant applications early, either:

- When the available budget is fully allocated, or
- On the extended closing date of 31 March 2022 at 5pm, whichever comes first.

ERIG aims to support businesses to recover from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by helping them develop new or improve existing products, services or processes through innovation. It provides grant support for the development, testing and introduction of an innovative project in a business.

**Businesses can access up to a maximum grant of £5,000 (taxable) to support eligible costs to progress their innovative project.**

ERIG is designed to complement rather than duplicate other regional support programmes.

ERIG is open to any business that can demonstrate it meets **all** the eligibility criteria outlined in this guidance.

ERIG is managed and administered by Invest NI.

This support is part funded by the Department for Economy Economic Recovery Action Plan.

## ELIGIBILITY

ERIG is open to all businesses that meet the following eligibility criteria; businesses must be:

- Based in Northern Ireland
- Classified as a [SME](#)
- Pre-trading or actively trading
- Registered with HMRC
- Recognised as a Silver Level Innovator or equivalent (see Page 2).
- Able to confirm that the ERIG grant payment will not take them over the State Aid de minimis ceiling of €200,000 over the current and two previous fiscal years, or if applicable, the £315,000 Minimal Financial Assistance contribution.



## SILVER LEVEL INNOVATOR RECOGNITION

There are four [Innovation Recognition Levels](#); these are issued by Innovate NI based on the applicant's progress against the [Innovation Framework](#). Only applicants assessed as Silver Level Innovators or equivalent are eligible to apply for ERIG.

Any business which has obtained Silver Level Innovator recognition **since 01 April 2021** is not required to repeat the Innovation Assessment.

However, if your business has received a Silver Level Innovator recognition from Innovate NI **prior to 01 April 2021**, we require you to re-submit your Innovation Assessment before beginning the ERIG application process to ensure your innovation recognition level is accurate.

The only exception to this criteria is if, when considering the information provided in the Innovation Assessment, Invest NI deems that the business has identified a project that will lead to a new or improved process, product, service or business model which has the potential to deliver **business improvement**.

This business improvement must relate to the actual development of a new or improved product, service, process or business model which enhances the established core business.

In this case, providing that business specific projects have progressed through the equivalent steps of the Innovation Framework (i.e. the business must have selected an innovative project and must be currently developing it), Invest NI may consider the applicant as equivalent to a Silver Level Innovator and provide access to the ERIG application.

ERIG will be restricted to one application per business, for one active innovation project, based on receipt of a Silver Level Innovator recognition (since 01 April 2021), or equivalent.

Bronze, Gold and Platinum Level Innovators are not eligible to apply for ERIG.

## EXCLUSIONS

**A business is not eligible to apply if:**

- It has a current Invest NI Letter of Offer or has received financial support from Invest NI within the last 3 years, however, support via Invest NI Innovation Vouchers and NI Executive COVID Emergency Schemes are excluded from this. For more detail on these exceptions see our [Frequently Asked Questions](#).
- It is currently a Bronze Level Innovator, or has received Gold or Platinum Level Innovator recognition in the past.
- The project it is applying for has received financial assistance from another government or public sector source (with the exception of Invest NI Innovation Vouchers).
- It is a primary agricultural producer i.e. those primarily concerned with crop or animal production or forestry or logging or fisheries or aquaculture are not eligible to apply for ERIG. However, agricultural businesses associated with the processing, marketing and retail of agricultural products are eligible to apply.
- The grant received will result in the business exceeding its applicable State Aid de minimis or Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) ceiling in the last three years are not eligible to apply for ERIG.



## FURTHER CONDITIONS

Other conditions that will be considered and may make your application ineligible are:

- Businesses involved in activities that Invest NI considers as ineligible or as involving unacceptable reputational risk, such as gambling, adult entertainment, tobacco products and cannabis-based products, which are not, authorised as medicines.
- ERIG will be restricted to one application per business, for one active innovation project, based on proof of Silver Level Innovator recognition (since 01 April 2021) or equivalent.

## ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Eligible projects can use ERIG to contribute toward the costs of associated with developing the innovative project. Costs may include:

- Testing and developing new products or processes
- Equipment
- Skills Development
- Marketing
- Consultancy

Listed below are the activities that may be used against each cost category:

- **Skills development:** Costs associated with training and/or courses that staff may need to attend associated with the development and implementation of new process, service or product.
- **Marketing:** Costs associated with pre-commercialisation tasks and preparing for market launch such as preparing sales and marketing plans, developing marketing collateral, establishing channels to market etc.
- **Consultancy:** Costs associated with defining the market opportunity for the new product, process or service. These may include financial or technical feasibility studies or completing a scientific literature review.
- **Equipment:** Costs for equipment used during the actual project development stage, i.e. small IT equipment or equipment required to develop and/or implement new or improved product, service, process or business model.
- **Trials and testing:** Costs associated with trialling and testing during the development stage of the new product, service, process or business model.

## INELGIBLE COSTS

Costs incurred pre-receipt of an ERIG Letter of Offer **will not** be considered eligible. ERIG cannot be used to support or subsidise existing salary costs.



## TIMESCALES

ERIG has now been extended for applications. Projects will be appraised on a first-come first served basis. Invest NI reserves the right to close the grant applications:

- When the available budget is fully allocated, or
- On 31 March 2022 at 5pm, whichever comes first.

Invest NI recommends that you apply as early as possible, as the assessment and application process may take **several weeks** to complete.

Businesses must complete all **3 steps of the application process** (detailed below) by 31 March 2022.

Therefore, we advise businesses complete the Eligibility Checker (Step 1) and submit their Innovation Assessment (Step 2) **by Wednesday 23 March 2022** to allow sufficient time to complete the ERIG application (Step 3), if eligible.

Please read and check your application before submission as corrections or additional information provided after the closing date may delay processing of your application to such an extent that the available budget is expended.

**Applications are only considered valid if all sections of the application form have been fully completed. Only valid applications will be processed.**

## HOW TO APPLY

Before you start the application process, we recommend you familiarise yourself with the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document.

**The ERIG process is a 3-step process:**

### Step 1 – Complete the Eligibility Checker

This online checker will ask you key questions relating to the funding scheme's criteria, quickly assessing if you are eligible to apply for ERIG.  
Find out if you are eligible to apply for ERIG by completing the [Eligibility Checker](#).

### Step 2 – Apply to Innovate NI for your Innovation Recognition Level

If your business meets Invest NI's main eligibility requirements, but is not in possession of Silver Level Innovator recognition (dated 01 April 2021 or later), you will be directed to complete and submit an [Innovation Assessment](#) to Innovate NI.

### Completing your Innovation Assessment

The Innovation Assessment takes around 30 minutes to complete and all the questions are mandatory unless indicated.

Complete the form using one innovative idea only, and make sure that your idea aligns with the definition that innovation is a novel idea that creates value.

Make sure you explain the following in detail:

- How your idea will/does **add value** to your business.
- How your idea **clearly differs** from what others are offering.



- How you will/did **evaluate and test** your idea.
- If introducing new digital technology, how did this change/improvement to your services/business model add value to your business.

It may take several weeks to assess your innovation activities and issue an Innovation Recognition Level, if appropriate.

Businesses assessed as a Silver Level Innovator (or equivalent) will be notified by email that they may be eligible for ERIG support and granted access to the application form on the MyINI.investni.com Customer Portal.

### Step 3 – Apply for ERIG

Invest NI will provide all eligible businesses access to the online application on MyINI via email.

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED TO APPLY

To complete your online ERIG application you will need to provide the following information:

- Your business details including information such as business type, trading and SME status, the number of employees, sales turnover, industry sector, etc.
- An overview of the proposed innovation project which has received Silver Level Innovator recognition (or equivalent) which you wish to progress. Include information on what the project will do, how it will benefit your business, how you propose to use this funding, any risks associated with the project and how you propose to mitigate against them.
- Project details including costs, relevant tasks, timeframes and proposed outcomes.
- Information on state aid (to help us to assess the requirements for your business).

You will need to provide **five** types of documents electronically:

**Proof of identity:** A form of Photographic ID, such as a scanned or photograph copy of a valid passport or a current (full or provisional) driving licence photo card. In the case of a limited company this must be a registered Director of the applicant company.

**Proof of business legitimacy:** A clear and legible scanned, photograph or screenshot copy of your HMRC SA302 or tax calculation document, or your SA250 document, which demonstrates that the applicant is a business. This should show your Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR), as well as your/business/company name and address. For Limited companies the UTR number should be in the name of the registered legal business entity.

**Proof of address:** A utility bill, bank statement, rates bill, etc for the business dated within the previous three months of the date you submit your application.

**Bank details:** A UK (sterling) bank statement for an account used by your business that confirms your business entity, bank account number and sort code (only provide bank account details where a BACS payment can be accepted). The statement must be dated within the last three months of the date you submit your application. For limited companies the bank statement should be in the name of the legal business entity.

**Silver Level Innovator status (or equivalent):** A copy of your Silver Level Innovator certificate awarded from Innovate NI (issued on or after 01 April 2021) or written proof of the outcome of your Innovation Assessment.



Please note only costs incurred after acceptance of an ERIG Letter of Offer will be considered eligible.

## Upload supporting documents

Attach documents to your application by clicking 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 3MB.

- A brief description for each file uploaded is required.
- Attachments should be in either PDF, PNG, JPG or JPEG format.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Eligible businesses which are granted access to MyINI will be asked to complete several different sections and we recommend answering all the questions as fully as possible. The ERIG application process takes approximately one hour to complete.

You can save your application and return to it at any time, prior to the closing date of 5pm, 31 March 2022 or when the available budget is fully allocated whichever comes first.

If it is considered necessary to close the scheme prior to 31 March 2022, you will be notified by email of the amended closing date in advance.

## VERIFYING YOUR APPLICATION

Your application will be verified based on the information you provide in your online application form, which must be submitted before the closing deadline.

Please note, Invest NI will only progress applications that have provided **all** the electronic supporting documentation required, otherwise Invest NI reserves the right to reject your application or put your application on hold, which will delay its progress until the correct documentation is obtained.

Your application will be checked against the ERIG eligibility criteria and the information provided in your Innovation Assessment. The status of your application form can be viewed at any stage on the Customer Portal.

## NOTIFICATION OF FUNDING DECISION

A final decision may take up to two weeks from submission of your application on the Customer Portal to notification of the funding decision. The submission deadline for ERIG applications is 31 March 2022 at 5pm.

Please do not start your innovative 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 considered and could prevent you from accessing any of the funding awarded.

All applicants will be informed on the outcome of their ERIG application.

## ACCEPTING YOUR LETTER OF OFFER

Invest NI grant support is issued to customers in a contract known as a Letter of Offer. Once an application is approved, successful applicants will be informed, and a Letter of Offer will be issued.

All Letters of Offer must be signed and accepted within the required timeframe, otherwise



the Offer will become invalid.

In line with Invest NI's Digital Transformation Strategy, Letters of Offer are issued and accepted digitally as standard, using a digital signatures platform. The digital signatures platform used by Invest NI is [Signable](#). Please read the [step-by-step guidance](#) on how to accept your Letter of Offer through Signable.

Once Invest NI has received your signed Letter of Offer this will constitute acceptance of your offer and will automatically trigger a grant payment to be made to the appropriate business bank account provided.

## COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK PROCEDURE

Invest NI will determine at its sole discretion:

- whether sufficient information has been provided to validate an application.
- whether an application has been successful.
- the amount and terms of funding awarded.

If you have any enquiries about your application please [contact us](#) and a member of the ERIG team will get back to you.

## 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 by you 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

ERIG 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 funding 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

From 1 January 2021, all subsidies provided by public authorities in Northern Ireland must comply with either the EU State aid rules or the subsidy control chapter of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement and any other international subsidy commitments.

This grant will therefore be paid either on the basis that it complies with all the terms and conditions of Commission Regulation ((EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 (De Minimis aid Regulation), or that it complies with the subsidy control chapter of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement and any other international subsidy commitments.

The differentiation is that:



- De minimis aid describes small amounts of public funding to business that has a negligible impact on trade and competition across EU member states. A single company can receive up to €200,000 de minimis aid over three consecutive fiscal years
- Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) describes small amount of public funding provided to Northern Ireland businesses that are exempt from adhering to the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement. A single company can receive up to £315,000 of aid over three consecutive fiscal years.

Further information can be found at: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/introduction-state-aid>