

How to win R&D funding

If you require this document in an alternative format (including Braille, audio disk, large print or in minority languages to meet the needs of those whose first language is not English) then please contact:

Invest NI Equality

Tel: 028 9069 8273

Email: equality@investni.com

Text Relay Number: 18001 028 9069 8273



20
Top tips

Your guide to applying
for Innovate UK funding.

investni.com

As the UK Innovation Agency, with a remit to support business growth across the UK, Innovate UK offers funding for research and development to ambitious companies seeking to commercialise new products, processes and services ahead of the competition.

So why are you not engaging with Innovate UK? Every year Innovate UK runs competitions that award in excess of £400m of grant support to help businesses with innovative, problem-solving ideas bring them to market.

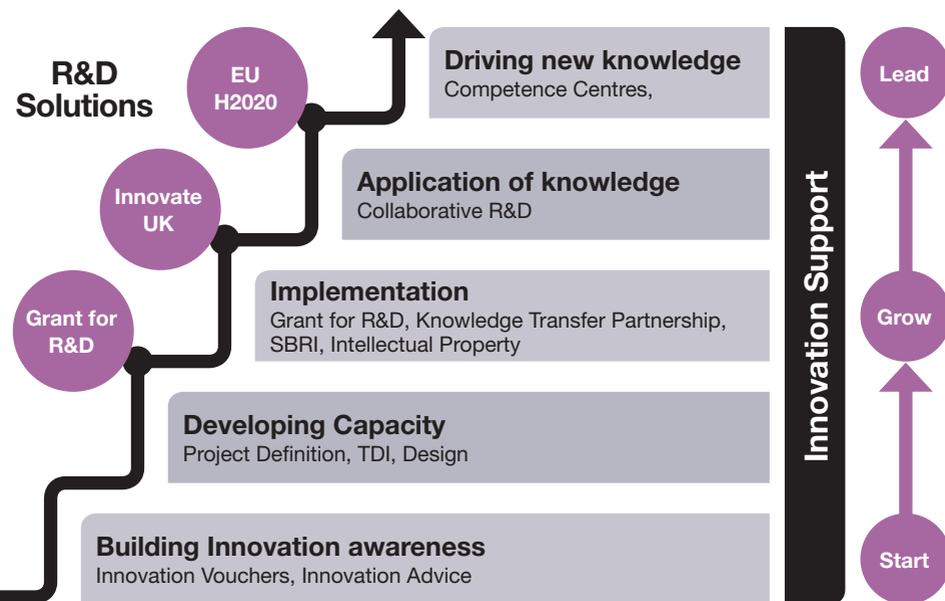
Invest Northern Ireland is working in partnership with Innovate UK to help Northern Ireland companies secure some of this funding for their R&D projects. Invest Northern Ireland can help you to understand the application process and plan R&D projects that have the best chance of success.

In this document you will find 20 top tips to help you complete a successful application for Innovate UK funding. These tips will help you understand what goes into making a successful application, helping you to “sell” your project idea by ensuring it fits with Innovate UK priority areas and demonstrates real market potential with benefits to your profitability and the UK economy.



The Innovation Escalator

Think of innovation as a journey where you start off with ambitions to be the best. An innovation voucher can let you tap into specialist knowledge to develop forward-thinking solutions or ideas to expand, improve or create new products, services and processes that will help you compete more effectively. Invest NI can improve your capability through support for project planning and design. We offer a range of grants towards the cost of implementing an R&D project that enables you to export your new products and services for the first time.



Your ambitions don't have to stop there. Being able to export your products globally requires you to anticipate market trends before others and develop products that can beat your competitors. To do this you need to know what others are doing and tap into expertise - you need to collaborate with others. You can collaborate with other businesses, universities or research organisations, locally, nationally or internationally. The process is called open innovation and can be a reality by working with NI Competence Centres, participating in Innovate UK programmes and Horizon 2020, the EU programme for R&D and Innovation – effectively paid business development.

The companies that make the most from being involved in collaborative programmes such as those offered by Innovate UK and Horizon 2020 are the ones that commit the time and effort to develop good proposals. As well as being able to access very attractive rates of financial support, the collaborative process gives you the chance to build business trust with potential customers and suppliers. Here are 20 tips to help you succeed.

Our top 20 tips for applying to Innovate UK

1 Before you do anything you should identify and verify the market need and the commercial opportunity

Show who and how many people are going to use your product/service. Engage those end users for feedback, input, verification of need and opportunity. What problem is your product solving? What benefit(s) is your product delivering? For example, better functions, lower costs, improved efficiency. What are the major competing products? What will your product or service do differently?

2 Don't let a submitted application be your first engagement with Innovate UK

The thematic area strategies are developed in consultation with the community – **get involved!** Competitions are designed to address unmet needs in a specific area, or societal challenge. If you are involved in this process, you will know what is coming and when. Competitions are signalled to the community both in the individual thematic area strategies and in the [Innovate UK annual Delivery Plan](#). This should enable you to plan your proposals and identify collaborators in advance. You should go along to the consortium-building workshops in the months running up to a competition and sign up to Innovate UK's open innovation platform [_connect](#). You will then be aware of what is going on in your specific areas of interest.

3 Make an impact – think big

Now think BIGGER again. This project is not just for Northern Ireland, so demonstrate how it could impact the whole UK economy and potential markets outside the UK. **Be ambitious!** When you're looking for partners think outside Northern Ireland. What industry experts could you use? Just because a company or consultant is close to hand or you have worked with them before doesn't mean they are the best for this project. Draw on the whole UK-wide supply chain: Catapults, Launchpads, academics, researchers etc. If it is a technical project that requires the best technical partners and you haven't sought them out, you will be marked down.

4 Read the guidance for applicants (GFA)

In fact read it twice, before you answer any question and refer to it throughout the preparation phase. The GFA asks a series of questions related to each question on the application form. You should prepare your application by answering these questions as they align with the scoring criteria. Cut and paste the guidance notes for each question onto the space provided in the application form and use them to frame your answer.

5 Answer the questions

The assessors have a defined way to score the application. You will lose marks by providing information not requested or not giving information that is requested. Remember, once you have submitted the application there will be no follow-up to request further information – you are judged purely on the information provided.

6 Use the full application form

The space on the application form is an opportunity for you to fully make your case for funding. If you can't fill it meaningfully then you should really question whether you have a viable project or business idea.

7 Don't let your answers overflow into appendices

If information is important ensure you include it in the main part of the application form. Assessors may only scan the appendices so they should only include additional supporting information.

8 Don't make unqualified statements

For example, "This project is highly innovative" is an unqualified statement. Always substantiate a statement with some evidence. "We believe this project to be highly innovative because thorough literature searches using XXXXX tool and patent searches using Espacenet with search references YYYYY, ZZZZZ yielded limited results, which are summarised in appendix B." If you say you have checked Espacenet with a search term don't be surprised if an assessor repeats the search. Similarly if you say your product will be the biggest, fastest, lightest etc, please give details of size, speed, weight etc and show how this compares to what is currently available.

9 Don't try to bend the rules about appendices

There is guidance in the GFA about how much you can include in the appendices. Trying to cram more into your appendices than is allowed could result in them not being read at all.

10 Try to capture the assessor's attention; make your application a clear, concise and compelling read

Assessors tend to be working professionals with full-time jobs, so they will be marking your application on a night, weekend or over lunch. Make it easy to read and don't be over technical (not all assessors will be experts in your given field). **Sell it, don't tell it!**

11 Make sure your collaborators are collaborators, not sub contractors

Don't try to make a sub-contractor into a collaborator for the purpose of securing a grant. If you have collaborators, you need to demonstrate how all collaborators will benefit from the project and the exploitation of the technology. Ensure they have input into the proposal and that it is not one-sided. This will be evident in the application and can often question the true nature of a collaboration. There needs to be shared risk and benefit. All participants need to sign a collaborative agreement before any work begins. The collaborative agreement should clearly show who does what, how the intellectual property is shared, how each collaborator benefits and how they will be able to exploit the technology being developed.

12 Think like a project manager

Provide a clear project execution plan with objectives, deliverables, timelines and resources. Break the project down into bite-size chunks that are strategic, measurable and achievable.

13 Costs need to be transparent

Provide as much information as possible about the costs. If they are only estimates, say so. Providing too little cost information can seriously damage the credibility of an application, especially as this is one of the last questions to be marked.

14 Use the Invest NI Innovation advisors and the knowledge transfer networks

We can review your application and give you feedback. A fresh pair of eyes and an impartial opinion can be the difference between success and failure.

15 Start early

Applications typically take weeks to prepare so ensure you start yours early and give yourself, your business colleagues and your collaborators plenty of time to review it.

16 Make the same effort for all questions

All questions are scored equally, therefore all questions warrant the same level of care and attention. Overfilling the form to answer one question at the expense of space to answer the subsequent questions is not likely to yield a successful application. Remember, this is a competitive process, and the assessors can only make their judgement on the information you have supplied.

17 Do research on whether your project aligns to UK or EU strategy

You will find information in the Innovate UK delivery plan. The priority technology areas and key industry sectors have either a National or European strategy document highlighting the main opportunities in that area. You can make reference to them in your application to show how your project aligns to the strategy.

18 Do not make assumptions

Firstly, don't assume those assessing your application are experts in your area. Make sure you explain everything clearly. Secondly, if you make assumptions in your application, show how you have arrived at those assumptions and the source of the information on which they are based. **Don't cut and paste information from easily accessible web sources.**

19 Do not use jargon, acronyms or buzzwords

Keep the language simple, accurate and clear. If you need to include technical terms make sure you explain what they mean when you first use them.

20 Finally and most importantly

- Read each question
 - Understand the question
 - Answer the question
 - When you have answered the question, re-read the question and your answer, to make sure you have answered the question fully and clearly
 - Send it to an Innovation Advisor or the knowledge transfer network for a final read through before you submit
-