

Investment Grant-Aid Scheme for Private & Community SMEs

Guidelines for Applicants

Version 12: October 24, 2024

EU Just Transition Fund Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026

Slieve Bloom, Mountain Bike Trails, Co Offaly



Riailtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly



Fáilte
Ireland

Co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through the EU Just Transition Fund

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Version Control		
Version	Date	Change description
1	29 August 2023	Initial Version
2	7 September 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 9: “Key dates”; EOI Closing dates and Application form closing dates are included. Page 12: Change to “Note” under Category 1 and Category 2, projects that have not secured planning permission at EOI stage are not precluded from submitting an expression of interest form. Projects must have secured planning permission before an application is submitted.
3	11 December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 9: “Key dates”; EOI Closing Dates: Category 4 closing date for submitting an EOI changed to 12 Noon on the 31st January 2024.
4	15 December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 9: “Key dates”, EOI Closing Dates; “12 Noon” is now added to the closing dates for submitting an EOI under Categories 1,2,3 and 5 and under “Investment Grant Application Form Closing” “12 noon” is now added to the closing date for submitting an Investment Grant Application form for Categories 1,2 and 3. Page 42: “Accommodation providers included”; the second bullet point under Accommodation is now part of the first bullet point and the word “included” is added. Page 42: “Accommodation providers not included (ineligible)”, this is now a header.
5	16 January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 19: “De Minimis Aid”, Changed: De Minimis Regulation (1407/2013) to De Minimis Regulation (2023/2831) and changed €200,000 to €300,000. Page 19: Removed: “This ceiling is subject to review and may be increased in any new De Minimis Regulation. All applicants will be advised if this ceiling changes during the course of this Investment Grant Scheme.”
6	16 February 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 20: “Investment Grant-aid bands and rates”: Investment grants of between €10,001 and €275,000 changed to Investment grants of between €10,001 and €300,000. Page 20: “Investment Grant-aid bands and rates”: Investment grants of between €275,001 and €2,000,000 changed to €300,001 and €2,000,000 Page 51: “Security”: changed €200,000 to €300,000.
7	19 March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 43: Remove “Costs incurred and / or paid before date of approval by Fáilte Ireland of the project”
8	4 April 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 44: Under: “Category Specific Eligibility Requirements”: The following is now added: “Accommodation providers include: Registered or approved (or in application) under Fáilte Ireland’s National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) as of September 2023 including; Hotels, Guest houses, Holiday Hostel, Youth Hostels, Caravan & Camping Parks, Self-Catering, Holiday Camps, B&Bs, Historic Houses, Self[1]Catering Activity Holiday Accommodation, Camping, Glamping, Hostel, Cruise Hire.
9	17 May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 20: “Investment Grant-aid bands and rates”: Under Category 2 and 3; change De Minimis Limit to €300,000.

Version Control

Version	Date	Change description
10	13 June 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 10: Change “31 December 2024” to 12 Noon on 13th January 2025 Page 14: Under Heading “Category 3 Capital Projects” remove “Under Category 3, Fáilte Ireland may provide support at its absolute discretion towards the cost of the planning and design stages, of a limited number of Tourism Capital Developments that have not yet secured planning approval and/ or may not be delivered before August 2026. Please note only those projects which have potential, in the view of Fáilte Ireland, to make a significant contribution to Tourism and economic development, and achieving the objectives and vision of the Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme will be deemed eligible under Category 3.” and replace with: “Under Category 3 , Fáilte Ireland may provide support towards the cost of the planning and design stages, of a limited number of significant Tourism Capital Developments that have not yet secured planning approval and/ or may not be delivered before August 2026. Projects which secure planning approval and all other statutory consents required may then be eligible to apply again under either Category 1 or 2 above if the project can be completed by August 2026. They would however need to have indicated this intention at the time of submission of the Expression of Interest and be deemed eligible for these other categories, stating the priority of each category.”
11	21 August 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 29: Current text: Should an application (for any project Category) be rejected by Fáilte Ireland at the Expression of Interest Stage or at any subsequent stage of the application process, the applicant may appeal this outcome as follows: Update to: Should an application (for any project Category) be rejected by Fáilte Ireland at application stage, the applicant may appeal this outcome as follows:

Version Control		
Version	Date	Change description
12	24 October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Page 5: New page for Additional Version Control added • Updated Table of Contents • Page 22: Added text: “,provided those costs are for capital spending directly related to the completion of the proposed project” • Page 28: Removed: “Applications must be accompanied by the quotations for work which applicants will seek, from suitably qualified third-party suppliers, to implement the solutions identified in the Roadmap. In seeking quotes for work, applicants must adhere to public procurement rules (where applicable). The ‘Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services’ are available at the following link: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c23f5-publicprocurement-guidelines-for-goods-and-services/”



1. Introduction

Background

For generations, Ireland’s peatlands have been a powerful resource, acting not just as sources of fuel and employment but as an important focus for local communities, their traditions, and stories too. The urgent need to address climate change means it’s time to put the relationship between people and peatlands on a fairer footing. We need to establish sustainable ways to support the livelihoods of the communities around Ireland’s raised bogs, while helping these unique natural habitats to recover and thrive.

The Programme Priorities of the EUJTF are as follows:

1. Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy
2. Supporting the regeneration and repurposing of peatlands and related land
3. Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition.

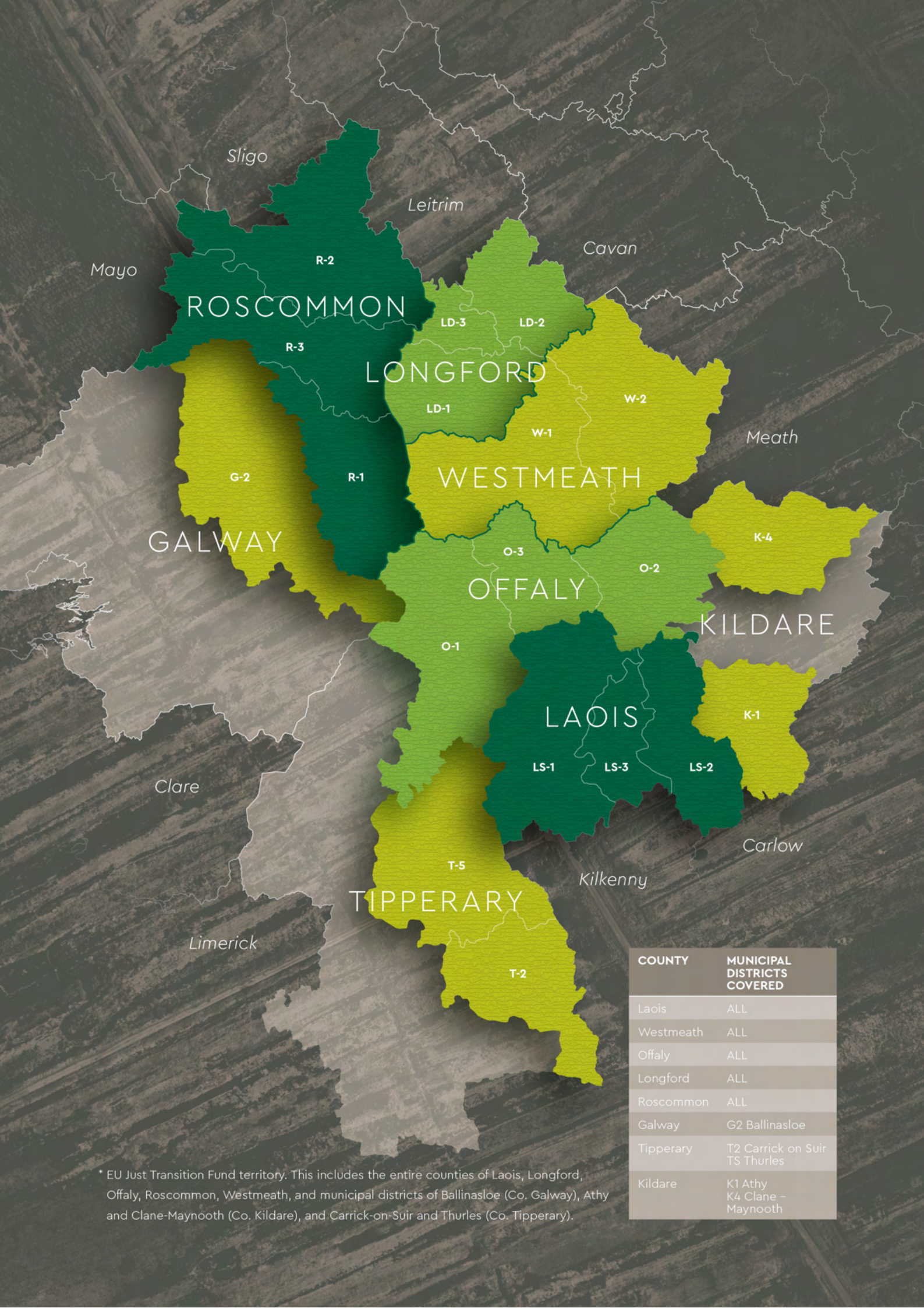
What is the EU Co-funded Just Transition Fund?

The purpose of the EU Just Transition Fund (EUJTF), co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union, is to assist the territories most affected by the transition to a climate neutral economy. In Ireland this focuses on the wider Midlands region, where there have been direct impacts from the move away from peat production and electricity generation from peat. To facilitate a just transition towards a low-carbon economy in the Midlands, the EU and the Government of Ireland have established a €169million Just Transition Fund for the period 2023-2026.

EU JTF Territory

As mentioned above, the Fund is designed to target areas that are most negatively affected by the transition towards climate neutrality. Several evidence-based assessments have identified certain counties and municipal districts in the wider Midlands as being the most negatively affected in Ireland by the closure of peat-reliant power stations. This will therefore be the target area of the EU JTF. The territory will consist of the counties and municipal districts listed in the table below as well as in the map.

County	Municipal District
Laois	All
Westmeath	All
Offaly	All
Longford	All
Roscommon	All
Galway	G2 Ballinasloe
Tipperary	T2 Carrick on Suir, T5 Thurles
Kildare	K1 Athy, K4 Clane - Maynooth



COUNTY	MUNICIPAL DISTRICTS COVERED
Laois	ALL
Westmeath	ALL
Offaly	ALL
Longford	ALL
Roscommon	ALL
Galway	G2 Ballinasloe
Tipperary	T2 Carrick on Suir TS Thurles
Kildare	K1 Athy K4 Clane - Maynooth

* EU Just Transition Fund territory. This includes the entire counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath, and municipal districts of Ballinasloe (Co. Galway), Athy and Clane-Maynooth (Co. Kildare), and Carrick-on-Suir and Thurles (Co. Tipperary).

What is Fáilte Ireland's Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme?

Under the EU Just Transition Fund, Fáilte Ireland has been appointed as an intermediate body which acts under the responsibility of EMRA¹, tasked with the administration of up to €68 million for a Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme 2023-2026. Through this scheme Fáilte Ireland will invest in the sustainable development of tourism in the Midlands with the aim of diversifying the regional economy by creating jobs, supporting habitats and biodiversity and sustaining communities.

The objectives of the overall Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme 2023-2026 are to foster the economic diversification of the territory by supporting productive investments in micro-enterprises, SME's and economic stakeholders in key sectors by:

1. Enhancing the attractiveness of the region as a place to live, work and visit by utilising tourism as a regenerative force with net positive outcomes for communities and nature. The scheme will seek to enhance regional towns and villages as attractive places to live with strong tourism & recreation infrastructure that can transform the economies of the midlands beyond tourism (indirect benefits).
2. Creating new enterprises and jobs by investing in existing and new tourism products and experiences, establishing the Midlands as a regenerative tourism destination, based on its authentic heritage and culture.
3. Stimulating the development and growth of tourism enterprises by building the capacity and capability of the sector through a range of non-capital interventions such as enterprise supports and the establishment of a Tourism Activator Scheme.

4. Supporting the transition of the Midlands to a carbon neutral destination through funding of sustainable tourism projects that are designed to have regenerative impacts on local communities and nature, and in particular peatlands.

There are two main elements to the overall scheme:

1. Up to €38m towards the diversification of the regional economy through the sustainable development of tourism;
2. Up to €30m towards the regeneration and repurposing of peatlands through the development of a network of trails.

The overall scheme will be delivered through a range of Investment Grant Schemes, which will run in parallel between now and the end of 2026, as follows:

Scheme A: Trail Network Development Scheme

Scheme B: Investment Grant-Aid Scheme for Private and Community SMEs

Scheme C & D: Investment Grant-Aid Scheme for Local Authorities and certain State Agencies

Scheme E: Appointment of County Tourism Activators to Local Authorities

Scheme F: Enterprise Supports Scheme

Scheme G: Smart Tourism Partnership Scheme.

These Guidelines are for Scheme B: Investment Grant-Aid Scheme for SMEs and Fáilte Ireland has allocated up to €17m to this scheme. This figure may change over the lifetime of the scheme depending on the demand exhibited from both this scheme and from other schemes within the overall Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme 2023-2026.

1. The Eastern Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA) is the Managing Authority for the management and implementation of the EUJTF Programme in Ireland.

Fáilte Ireland's Vision for regenerative tourism in the Just Transition Fund Territory

This is a region where tourism levels are relatively low but where there is an opportunity to develop tourism to be a stronger part of the regional economy. Such future development has to be undertaken in a way that delivers positive benefits for nature and communities in particular.

A regenerative approach to tourism puts the place at the centre of the tourism model and seeks to deliver net positive benefits for all stakeholders – the environment, the community, the industry and the visitor.

Fáilte Ireland has prepared a useful [Introduction and Approach to Regenerative Tourism](#). It will be necessary to read this Introduction in conjunction with these Guidelines in order to complete the Expression of Interest Form and the Application Form.

There is already a strong tradition of

community-based tourism in the region, including community-based tourism enterprises or tourism businesses that are deeply embedded within local communities.

Bord na Móna is leading the Peatlands Climate Action Scheme (PCAS), one of the most significant and ambitious conservation projects in Europe. This creates an unparalleled natural backdrop for sustainable and regenerative visitor experiences.

As part of the Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme Fáilte Ireland is also leading significant, comprehensive investment in the creation of an interconnected Midlands Trail Network. A latticework of walking, cycling and water trails across the Midlands has the potential to provide visitors and locals alike with ways to get active, explore and make connections right across the region.



Ridge of Capard, Slieve Bloom, Co Laois

About this Investment Grant Scheme

Purpose of this Investment Grant Scheme

This scheme fits under Priority 1 of the EU Just Transition Fund which means its focus is to – *Foster the economic diversification of the territory by supporting productive investments in micro-enterprises, SMEs and economic stakeholders in key sectors.*

There is up to €17m available under this scheme and its purpose is to deliver grant-aid to private and community-based micro enterprises and SMEs to help them improve the quality of the visitor experience with the ambition of attracting more visitors, increasing their dwell time, and securing overnight stays in the region because the visitor has confidence that there's lots to see and do. This will create new jobs in the sector and grow the visitor economy. Through this scheme, Fáilte Ireland will also provide funding to develop the digital capabilities of businesses to make the most of opportunities offered by digitalisation and ensure an increase in the levels of inclusivity in tourism in the Territory.

This scheme is built on the principles of regenerative tourism. As such, any tourism investment must seek to develop tourism in a way that helps to deliver a low carbon future, provides net benefits for biodiversity and helps to regenerate local communities.

In our journey to net-zero Fáilte Ireland will require all applicants to measure their carbon footprint. A calculator and a number of resources have been made available to assist tourism businesses in this journey; [Carbon Calculator | Climate Action | Business Supports \(failteireland.ie\)](#) . In 2024 Fáilte Ireland, along with Tourism Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland will be launching an All-Island Sustainable Tourism Programme. Successful applicants will be required to partake in this programme.

All tourism businesses should aim to be universally accessible and create barrier-free tourism. This means ensuring tourist destinations, products and services are

accessible to all people, regardless of their physical limitations, disabilities or age. Accessible tourism aims to allow tourism destinations to be enjoyed equally by everyone. This Scheme promotes the horizontal principles of accessibility, respectful for fundamental rights, equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

All projects must be designed and implemented in accordance with and respectfully of the programme's horizontal principles which include the principles in accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Key dates

EOI Closing Dates:

The closing date submitting an EOI under Category 4 is 12 Noon on the 31st January 2024.

The closing date for submitting an EOI under Categories 1,2,3 and 5 is 12 Noon on the 30th June 2024.

Investment Grant Application Form Closing Date:

The closing date for submitting an Investment Grant Application form for Categories 1,2 and 3 is 12 Noon on the 13th January 2025.

Projects awarded funding must be completed by the end of August 2026

All grant-aided costs must be fully paid by the grantee by the end of September 2026 and final claims submitted to Fáilte Ireland by the end of October 2026. Grantees will be encouraged to draw down their grants on an ongoing basis and as early as possible.

Any grant claims that are outstanding after the end of October 2026 will be terminated and the grant recipient will be liable for the outstanding amounts at that stage.



2. Eligibility

Overarching Eligibility Criteria

To be considered for funding all projects will need to meet the following Overarching Eligibility Criteria.

1. **Must be an Eligible Project Type**, as defined below;
2. **Must be an Eligible Applicant**, as defined below;
3. **Must align with the objectives of *The Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme***; All projects will need to demonstrate how they will contribute to achieving the objectives and vision of The Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme proposed by Fáilte Ireland to the EU Just Transition Fund i.e.;
 - a. Contribute to the vision of regenerative tourism in the JTF area.
 - b. Contribute to the achievement of environmentally sustainability goals.
4. **Must be completed by end of August 2026**; Only projects which can reasonably be expected to be completed by the end of August 2026 are eligible for this Investment Grant Scheme. Grantees will need to ensure that all eligible costs are fully paid for by end of September 2026, drawn down from Fáilte Ireland as early as possible and final claims submitted by the end of October 2026. Projects which cannot be completed in the timescale above may be eligible to apply under Category 3 for certain planning and

design costs as set out below. This is at Fáilte Irelands discretion.)

5. **Must operate in the JTF Territory**; All applicants must operate within the JTF defined area. While the applicant may have a headquarters outside the defined area, only activities occurring within the JTF area will be eligible for funding. Should moveable assets be relocated to an alternative location outside of the territory all funding of the assets are immediately refundable, regardless of the duration of the relocation.
6. **Must commit to improving accessibility**; In general, projects funded under this Investment Grant Scheme will be required to be as universally accessible to visitors and staff as is reasonably possible. Where adaptations can improve accessibility and are within the scope of the proposed project, the cost of such adaptations are eligible for funding under this scheme.
7. **Must remain in operation**: Projects funded under this Investment Grant Scheme must remain in operation / in place for a minimum of 5 years following the payment of final funds (and possibly up to 10 years or more depending on the scale of the investment).

In addition, applications must meet the criteria specific to the project category under which they are applying. These are specified under each Category in Appendix 1.



What Projects are eligible?

Eligible Project Types

Under this scheme, there are five project categories under which applications will be accepted and considered for funding:

- **Category 1** – Development or Enhancement of Sustainable Visitor Experiences
- **Category 2** – Development of Sustainable/ Low Carbon Tourist Accommodation
- **Category 3** – Capital Project Planning & Design
- **Category 4** – Digital Transformation
- **Category 5** – Accessibility enhancements to provide a more inclusive visitor experience.

Category 1: Development or Enhancement of Sustainable Visitor Experiences

Category 1 includes the development of new or enhancement of existing;

- Visitor Attractions (including those offering Heritage, Culture, Nature or provision of Outdoor Activity/ Outdoor Recreation).
- Outdoor Activities and Experiences.
- ‘Stand-out’ features to enhance walking, cycling and water-based trails.
- Infrastructure supporting access to water and visitor use of new or existing walking, cycling and water-based trails.
- Start-up or expansion of tourism SMEs in the JTF Territory.

See Appendix 1 for a more detailed list of Eligible Project Types and Eligible expenditure.

Note: Only projects which, at the point of submission of the application form, which have already secured all required planning permission and statutory consents (where applicable) are eligible to apply under Category 1. This requirement does not preclude the submission of an expression of interest form. If planning approval has not been secured at

application stage (if required), the project may be eligible to apply under Category 3.

Category 2: Development of Sustainable/ Low Carbon Tourist Accommodation

Within the Just Transition region, it is recognised that the Visitor Accommodation sector is less developed than other more mature tourism destinations, this category is focused on widening the diversity of accommodation options available to visitors.

Under Category 2, Fáilte Ireland will provide support for the development of small-scale sustainable Tourist Accommodation which;

- demonstrates innovation by allowing visitors memorable experiences of connecting with nature, or;
- demonstrates excellence in terms of sustainable design, construction and operation, or;
- breathes new life into town and village centres by repurposing vacant buildings of significant heritage value (or significant value to the appearance of the town centre).
- Projects that are eligible for the vacant property refurbishment grant will not be eligible.

See Appendix 1 for a more detailed list of Eligible Project Types and Eligible expenditure.

Note: Only projects which, at the point of submission of the application form, which have already secured all required planning permission (for use as Tourist accommodation) and statutory consents (where applicable) are eligible to apply under Category 2. This requirement does not preclude the submission of an expression of interest form. If planning approval has not been secured at application stage (if required), the project may be eligible to apply under Category 3.

Category 3: Capital Project Planning & Design

Under Category 3, Fáilte Ireland may provide support towards the cost of the planning and design stages, of a limited number of significant Tourism Capital Developments that have not yet secured planning approval and/ or may not be delivered before August 2026. Projects which secure planning approval and all other statutory consents required may then be eligible to apply again under either Category 1 or 2 above if the project can be completed by August 2026. They would however need to have indicated this intention at the time of submission of the Expression of Interest and be deemed eligible for these other categories, stating the priority of each category.

Costs that may be supported under Category 3 will include professional fees involved in;

- Concept Development
- Feasibility Study
- Design Fees (Architects, Engineer, Interior design, Horticultural/ Outdoor amenity design, Exhibition design/ Interpretive design)
- Quantity Surveyor fees and costing
- High level / Outline Business Plan/ Commercialisation Plan
- Project Management
- Environmental Screening & Impact Assessment

Projects which secure planning approval and all other statutory consents required may then be eligible to apply again under either Category 1 or 2 above if the project can be completed by August 2026.

Category 4: Digital Transformation

In order to enable tourism businesses (selected business types as outlined in Appendix 1) in the Just Transition Territory to deliver a step-change in the efficiency of their key business processes, unlock greater productivity and enable improved financial outcomes, Fáilte Ireland will introduce a Digital Transformation Programme for businesses that will see it fund investment in website development, destination content development, booking engines, connected distribution, CRM systems, personalisation of marketing activity, automated marketing software and AI applications. The extent of the supports to be delivered to individual businesses will be determined via a Digital Maturity Audit of eligible applicants.

See Appendix 1 for a list of eligible business types and an outline of how this programme works.

Category 5: Accessibility enhancements to provide a more inclusive visitor experience.

Under Category 5 Fáilte Ireland will support tourism and hospitality businesses (accommodation, visitor experiences, attractions, activity providers and day tours, full-service restaurants, hotel restaurants and gastropubs) in the Just Transition territory to ensure a more inclusive visitor experience by:

- Improving the physical accessibility of indoor and outdoor visitor experiences and the accessibility of visitor services, including transportation, dining, entertainment and accommodation;
- Improving the provision of access information, including online and offline access information guides and trip planning tools as well as accessible booking and payment systems and web accessibility in accordance with WCAG 2.2. (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).

Fáilte Ireland has developed a number of online resources to introduce the area of accessibility, including an outline of an accessible tourism customer journey, video case studies on good practice advice on key legislation in this area while offering practical low-cost and no-cost tips to get started.

<https://supports.Failteireland.ie/courses/accessible-tourism>. It is recommended for projects to consult with people with disabilities (Disabled Persons Organisations or representative groups locally) in the planning and design phase.

See Appendix 1 for a more detailed list of Eligible Project Types and Eligible expenditure. Please note Fáilte Ireland reserves the right to update and amend this list of Eligible Project Types and Eligible Expenditure periodically during the course of this Investment Grant Scheme.

Ineligible Project Types

The following list of developments are not eligible for funding under this Investment Grant Scheme. Please note this list of ineligible project types is not exhaustive and Fáilte Ireland reserves the right to update this list periodically during the course of this Investment Grant Scheme.

- **Development of;**

- Trails
- Golf Courses
- Indoor leisure centres;
- Swimming pools (with the exception of outdoor lidos that are open to the public);
- Indoor and outdoor sports facilities and sports club facilities, sporting venues and tracks;
- Community playgrounds;
- Theatres & cinemas;
- Festivals
- Arts/Performances Spaces;

- Conference centres;
- Community centres;
- Educational institutions;
- Language schools;
- Wedding venues;
- New cafes, restaurants, pubs and bars (except as part of a visitor experience grant-aided under Category 1 or an accessibility grant under Category 5, or where it can offer a service that doesn't currently exist on a particular stretch of Greenway or walking/cycling trail);
- Retail facilities (except as part of a visitor experience investment grant-aided under Category 1 & 5 above);
- Breweries and Distilleries (except costs association with the visitor experience element, which may be eligible under Category 1& 5 above);
- Horseracing and horseracing clubs;
- Greyhound racing clubs and events;
- Non-fixed/ transient entertainment, e.g., circuses and funfairs;

- **Purchase of;**

- Motorised Transport (with the exception of visitor boats for sightseeing or vehicles required by Outdoor Activity Operators or Outdoor Activity Attractions);
- Cruise hire boats for overnight stays;
- Coaches and tour buses;
- Land or buildings

In addition, any applications that do not meet the overarching eligibility criteria, the criteria defining eligible applicants, or the category specific criteria identified per project category in Appendix 1 are ineligible for this grants scheme.

Who can apply to this Investment Grant Scheme?

Eligible Applicants

- This scheme is open to private and community sector applicants only;
- Applicants may be commercial, not-for-profit or charitable enterprises.
- This scheme is open to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Micro Enterprises only (applications will only be accepted from applicants with fewer than 250 employees and annual turnover below €50m or balance sheet below that does not exceed €43m).
- **Existing enterprises** will need to;
 - Be operating for a minimum of 6 months.
 - Be an SME, Micro Enterprise or Sole Trader
 - Be Tax Compliant (provide a Tax Compliance certificate)
- **Start-ups/ New Enterprises;** Enterprises in operation for less than 6 months may only be considered an eligible applicant to this scheme if they have adequately demonstrated in their application (in the view of Fáilte Ireland) that they;
 - Will generate employment;
 - Will generate €30,000 in eligible tourism turnover within 3 years of commencing business²;
 - Can demonstrate a positive track record in business in the view of Fáilte Ireland;
 - Will operate in the defined territory before the end of 2026;
 - Can demonstrate on application the ability to develop and deliver a sustainable and regenerative tourism project.

Ineligible Applicants

Please refer to the list of ineligible applicants in Appendix 2



2. Direct revenue from domestic and international visitors. This figure will exclude revenue from locals.

What costs are eligible?

Eligible costs

To be eligible for grant assistance, costs must have the following general characteristics:

- Must be integral to the project being investment grant-aided;
 - Must be such that the expenditure would not happen but for the investment grant aid;
 - Must be incurred by the body to whom the grant has been awarded;
 - Must be incurred after the grant has been awarded;
 - Must be incurred in line with Public Procurement Guidelines to demonstrate that all goods and services are procured in a fair and transparent manner. The 'Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services' are available at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c23f5-public-procurement-guidelines-for-goods-and-services>
- Please see Appendix 1 for a specific list of expenditure that is eligible under each Project category.

Ineligible costs

The following costs are ineligible in all cases:

- Purchase of land and buildings
- Repairs, maintenance and replacement expenses other than restoration/conservation expenses that have been specifically agreed in writing.
- Financing costs (including bank interest and charges)
- Overheads
- Any ongoing marketing costs
- Fines, penalty payments, legal costs, audit fees, ongoing insurances
- Recoverable Value added tax (VAT)
- "In-kind" contributions
- Costs which form or will form part of a claim for tax relief (for example under a section 482 provision)
- Costs incurred and/or paid before date of approval of the project
- Costs based on estimates or valuations and not supported by actual payment documentation.
- Unpaid costs
- Costs already grant-aided, sub-vented or assisted by this, or any other EU or Government scheme (including employment and training schemes). Note: while co-funding of projects with other sources of public funding is permitted, double funding is not. Therefore, total capital support from all European or State bodies cannot exceed 100% of the eligible costs within the project (or lower if so required under state aid rules).
- Costs paid for by a person/organisation other than the grantee.
- Loose fittings, furniture, road vehicles and boats except where integral to the activity specifically grant-aided in the letter of offer.
- Please check Appendix 1 for further detail on expenditure that is ineligible under the specific Category you are applying for.

Note: *In all cases, to be eligible, the costs must be integral to the delivery of the activity or project approved for grant-aid. No costs will be allowed for grant-aid if it does not comply with the approved project and Letter of Offer (or Investment Grant Agreement as required by Fáilte Ireland).*

3. What funding is available?

Discretionary Scheme

This is a discretionary grant scheme and only those applications that have adequately demonstrated that the proposed project satisfies the eligibility criteria and that they will assist Fáilte Ireland in meeting the objectives of this Investment Grant Scheme and its statutory objectives in line with Government policy and in compliance with EU law may be offered grant-aid. Any investment grant offer by Fáilte Ireland is also subject to budget availability.

In order to manage the budget and ensure that an appropriate balance of spend is achieved across the five categories to achieve the overall objectives of the scheme, Fáilte Ireland may place spending caps on one or more of the categories during the operation of the scheme depending on the demand generated for each category. This will be at the discretion of Fáilte Ireland.

At any time during the term of this Investment Grant Scheme Fáilte Ireland may decide to cease the funding of a particular type of project within any of the five categories by declaring such project type to be no longer eligible for reasons including, but not limited to: ensuring the diversification of tourism-related activities and infrastructure within a given locality; preventing displacement of existing business and/or economic viability of a project type. Fáilte Ireland may make this assessment on a case-by-case basis and by reference to the number and type of projects undertaken pursuant to this Investment Grant Scheme and the Strategic Partnerships with Local Authorities.

Legal Basis and EU State Aid

Fáilte Ireland as a state agency and the National Tourism Development Authority of Ireland must comply with European Union (EU) State Aid rules when it comes to executing its remit. This requirement applies therefore to this investment grant scheme, and it informs and determines what types of projects are eligible, what support can be provided by Fáilte Ireland and sets out conditions that recipients of funding must comply with.

State Aid law is a series of EU rules that regulate when, how and to what extent a Member State of the European Union may provide financial assistance to undertakings. In this context, the term 'undertaking' refers to any entity (no matter what its legal form) that is engaged in economic activity.

The fundamental rule of EU State Aid law which arises from Article 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union ('TFEU')

is that in principle any assistance that meets the definition of State Aid is illegal unless it is deemed compatible with the operation of the internal market or is of a kind that may be found by the European Commission to be compatible with its operation.

A State Aid test will be undertaken on a project-by-project basis, as per Appendix 10 of the Fáilte Ireland State Aid Handbook and if the project is considered an undertaking, the relevant State Aid rules will apply.

[State-Aid Handbook](#)

This scheme is operating under both the De Minimis Regulation and the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER). Grants will be awarded under de Minimis or the GBER Exemptions as appropriate³.

3. Category 2 grants will be awarded under De Minimis only.

De Minimis Aid

Under the De Minimis Regulation (2023/2831) the current ceiling for all De Minimis aid, regardless of the source, awarded to any single undertaking by any State agency or public body over a three-year fiscal period is €300,000.

This ceiling is subject to review and may be increased in any new De Minimis Regulation. All applicants will be advised if this ceiling changes during the course of this Investment Grant Scheme.

Applicants must declare to Fáilte Ireland any De Minimis aid received by them from any public body in the three years before funding is received from Fáilte Ireland (and any “in progress” applications for state funding). All projects will be checked for De Minimis applicability as part of the initial application and on submission of claims, and this may result in applications being ineligible for grant aid under this Scheme.

General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)

GBER is an EU measure that exempts Member States from the obligation to notify and seek EU Commission approval before funding is granted, once all GBER criteria are satisfied.

There are a number of exemptions from the State aid prohibition which Fáilte Ireland has identified within GBER as being relevant to the Eligible Project Types in this Investment Grant Scheme. These are provisions under which the aid may be provided legally without prior notification and clearance by the European Commission.

The relevance of the General Block Exemption Regulation is that the rules contained therein will determine the maximum amount of funding available in respect of the project.

These exemptions are identified below and set out in greater detail in the Fáilte Ireland State Aid Handbook.

State Aid Exemptions under GBER

Investment aid to SMEs
Regional Investment Aid
Aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures
Aid for culture and heritage conservation
Investment Aid for Energy Efficient Measures
Investment Aid for local infrastructures
Investment aid for publicly accessible recharging or refuelling infrastructure for zero and low emission road vehicles
Aid for consultancy in favour of SMEs

Investment Grant-aid bands and rates

- Micro investment grants can be offered up to a value of €10,000 at a grant-aid rate of 100% of total project costs (or lower, at the discretion of Fáilte Ireland and as State Aid rules allow)
- Investment grants of between €10,001 and €300,000 may be offered at a maximum grant-aid rate of 80% of total project costs (or lower, at the discretion of Fáilte Ireland and as State Aid rules allow)
- Investment grants of between €300,001 and €2,000,000 may be offered at a maximum grant-aid rate of 80% of total project costs (or lower, at the discretion of Fáilte Ireland and subject to State Aid rules)
- Awards of investment grants greater than €2,000,000 may be considered, at the discretion of Fáilte Ireland, for projects that will deliver a significant high economic impact. Grant-aid rates will be determined by State aid rules.
- Grants awarded under Category 4 (Digital Transformation) will be offered at a rate of up to 100% of eligible project costs where EU State Aid rules allow.
- Under Category 2, the maximum grant that can be awarded is €300,000.
- Under Category 3 the maximum grant awarded is €300,000.

Match funding

Match funding is required for all Investment Grants above €10,000, with the exception of Investment Grants awarded under Category 4 (Digital Transformation). The applicant will be required to contribute a minimum of 20% of total project costs as match funding. This can include costs that are ineligible for funding, provided those costs are for capital spending directly related to the completion of the proposed project.

Match funding may consist of the applicant's own funds, investor funds, borrowings or other sources of public funding subject to state aid rules.

In-kind' match funding (e.g., site value, voluntary labour etc) will not be accepted under the terms of this Programme.

You will be required to submit evidence of match funding with your Application Form. Your application will be deemed ineligible if this is not clearly evidenced to the satisfaction of Fáilte Ireland. This evidence can be provided either by:

1. a letter from your accountant/auditor confirming that you have sufficient match

2. funding from own resources and/or;
2. a Bank Facility Letter i.e., evidence of the availability of borrowings if you are borrowing to provide match funding.
3. Letters of offer from other sources of public funding.

Co-funding with other sources of EU and non-EU public funding

Funding from this Investment Grant Scheme may be combined with funding from other sources of EU and non-EU public funding.

Where a project is co-funded by other EU sources of funding, the different sources of EU funding must be clearly allocated to different areas of expenditure within the project.

While co-funding with other sources of public funding is permitted, double funding is not. Therefore, total support from all European or state government bodies, cannot exceed 100% of the project costs (or lower if so required by State Aid rules).



4. Application and Approvals Process

This section describes how to apply for this Investment Grant Scheme and how your application will be assessed. Please note:

- Submitting an application does not guarantee that funding will be approved. Funding is at the absolute discretion of Fáilte Ireland as set out in Section 3 of these Guidelines and is subject to the scheme criteria and objectives, the availability of Scheme Funding, State Aid rules, including de minimis thresholds, the rules within the Common Provisions Regulation⁴ and the Just Transition Fund Regulation⁵.
- Applications must be submitted via Fáilte

Ireland's online self-service portal at <https://tradeportal.failteireland.ie>

- Incomplete applications will not be assessed until all required information is received.
- Fáilte Ireland will assess complete applications in order of receipt.
- Where an applicant has indicated they wish to apply for funding under more than one category, those applications will be treated separately insofar as possible and they will be assessed in order of priority, as indicated by the applicant.

Expression of Interest

- The first step in the Application Process is to submit an Expression of Interest (EoI) form via Fáilte Ireland's online self-service portal at <https://tradeportal.failteireland.ie>. The purpose of this step is to allow Fáilte Ireland to determine if the project and the applicant are eligible for this Investment Grant Scheme.
- Bearing in mind the requirement to complete all funded projects by August 2026, applicants are encouraged to submit the EoI promptly so as to maximise the time available to them to fully define their project, progress through all subsequent steps in the application process and deliver the project.
- Any applicant or project that is not clearly eligible for this Investment Grant Scheme will be advised of this and will not proceed any further in the application process.
- Applicants will have the option of amending and resubmitting their EoI, but Fáilte Ireland will only accept one resubmission for the same project proposal. Fáilte Ireland's decision thereafter is final.
- If your proposal is deemed eligible, information outlining the next stage of the process will be issued to you via email.
- Please note that passing the EoI step in this process does not in itself confirm final eligibility on the project or applicant. Depending on the information provided at subsequent stages, the project or applicant may still be deemed ineligible for funding later in the process.
- After this initial step, the application process will differ depending on the Project Category you apply for.

4. REGULATION (EU) 2021/1060 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy

5. REGULATION (EU) 2021/1056 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund

Applications for Project Categories 1,2 and 3

- The first step in the Application Process is to submit an Expression of Interest (EoI) form as outlined above.
- Proposals deemed eligible on the basis of the EoI form will be sent a link to the Application Form and also to an Engagement Request Form.
- Applicants who are ready to complete the Application Form at this stage without engagement with Fáilte Ireland may proceed to do so.

Engagement with Fáilte Ireland in advance of submitting the Application

- Applicants who wish to clarify elements of the application form or discuss aspects of their proposal before submitting their application are welcome to use the Engagement Request Form to request interaction with Fáilte Ireland staff at this stage.
- This process is optional and is to provide clarification only. Fáilte Ireland is not responsible or liable for any decision taken, or view formed, by an applicant on the basis of this engagement and applicants must seek their own legal and other professional advice. All Applications will go through the independent evaluation process outlined below.

Application for Investment Grant Aid

- Proposals deemed eligible on the basis of the EOI form will be sent a link to the Application Form.
- All application forms must be completed online via Fáilte Ireland's online self-service portal at <https://tradeportal.failteireland.ie>.
- Note only applicants who have passed the

EoI stage will have access to the application form.

- Before you submit your application, please ensure that:
 - a) All sections of the form have been fully completed.
 - b) You have uploaded the correct supporting documents and files required
 - c) Incomplete applications will not be considered for assessment.
- At the application stage you will be asked to elaborate more on your project, you will be asked to tell us the extent to which your project proposal will contribute to the objectives of the EU Just Transition Fund – Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme 2023-2026 scheme and how your experience and story will appeal to visitors.
- We will require information on how you intend to meet basic compliance requirements, including proof that you have the legal right to undertake the project and operate it for a minimum of 5 years following the payment of final funds (and possibly up to 10 years or more depending on the scale of the investment).
- At this stage the applicant should have considered these application guidelines and the Fáilte Ireland State Aid Handbook and identified which State Aid exemption is potentially relevant for the project.
- The Application form must be accompanied by a number of mandatory documents, which will be specified in the Application Form itself and may include those listed in the table below. You will be able to upload these documents as you progress through the Application Process.

Mandatory Documents required at Application Stage

A full completed application form
Evidence of Company Size – Letter from accountant
Confirmation from Revenue if VAT registered
Articles of Association & Certificate of Incorporation
Constitution
Tax Clearance Access Number
Evidence of Site Ownership or Lease Agreement
Project Plan
Evidence of Project Location – e.g., Utility Bill or Eircode
Design, Drawings and Photos
Detailed Cost Plan
Historical Accounts if you are an existing organisation
Evidence of Match Funding
Visitor Experience Plan
Confirmation of Planning Permission and other statutory approvals
Business Plan
Financial Projections (5 year profit and loss account)

Note to Applicants: Accessibility Measures within Category 1,2 and 3 projects

Where an applicant wishes to apply for funding for accessibility adaptations as part of a wider project of a type that is eligible for Category 1, 2 or 3, they will follow the process outlined above for Applications for Project Categories 1,2 and 3. No separate application will be required however Fáilte Ireland may require an Accessibility Audit to determine what the applicant business needs to implement to provide a more inclusive visitor experience. The costs of the accessibility audit will be covered under this fund and the audit will be undertaken by an accessibility consultant appointed on behalf of Fáilte Ireland. The scope of the Accessibility Audit will be confined to the scope of works being proposed by the applicant and will not specify other accessibility works outside the scope of that project. The scope of work arising from the accessibility audit can then be costed by the applicant, in accordance with public procurement rules, and submitted as part of the application form.



Templemore, Co Tipperary

How your application will be assessed

Incomplete applications will not be assessed until all required information is received. Fáilte Ireland will assess complete applications in order of receipt.

Fáilte Ireland will use our tourism industry expertise and evaluation tools as required to ensure a fair and robust assessment of applications. Projects will be evaluated on their individual merit to ensure sufficient impact proportional to the funding ask of the application. The evaluation of projects will bring together a cross-disciplinary panel of internal reviewers (external expertise or support may be utilised as required). Fáilte Ireland reserves the right to use its absolute discretion on whether to award funding.

This is an open call rolling scheme and will close when the allocation of all available funds is exhausted. Eligible applications will be evaluated on a non-competitive basis in line with the objectives and priorities of the scheme as set out in sections 1 above.

Grant requests below the De Minimis threshold will be assessed using:

1. the overarching eligibility criteria;
2. the category specific eligibility criteria;
3. value for money.

Grant requests above the De Minimis threshold will be assessed against the following evaluation criteria, in addition to the eligibility criteria:

- 1. Meet the aims of the JTF Programme:**
- 2. Grow Economic Benefit through employment or tourism spend in the JTF territory:** by delivering and managing effectively new or improved tourism experiences to grow the appeal of the destination and regenerate the region economically. This can take the form of one or more of the following:
 - i. through the creation of new direct tourism employment and indirectly by stimulating job growth in other supporting sectors.
 - ii. an increase in dwell time by visitors; or
 - iii. contributing to new cluster of experiences or grow/strengthen existing clusters.

3. Represent Value for Money: Provide a sufficient economic impact in the view of Fáilte Ireland to the destination/ region based on the investment sought.

4. Sustainability and Regenerative

Tourism: Will the project be developed and delivered in a way that will contribute to the promotion of sustainable development and regenerative tourism. ensuring the project (a) has a low or zero carbon footprint, (b) contributes to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems, (c) ensures the sustainable use and protection of water resources, (d) contributes to the circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling, pollution prevention and control to air, water, and land, and (e) contributes to the regeneration of local communities. As a condition of all funding received, all applicants will be required to measure their carbon footprint and pursue sustainability certification.

Letter of Offer and implementation of approved project

Once the applicant has received and accepted the Letter of Offer (or Investment Grant Agreement as required by Fáilte Ireland), the applicant can then begin to implement the approved project. Full details of the grant claiming process will be provided with the Letter of Offer. The standard terms and conditions of an offer of funding from Fáilte Ireland are outlined in Appendix 3.

Applications for Project Category 4: Digital Transformation

To apply, businesses should submit an Expression of Interest (EoI) form as outlined above. Proposals deemed eligible on the basis of the EoI form will be invited to embark on Fáilte Ireland's Just Transition Digital Transformation Programme. This is a structured programme which will be provided over the course of two years and involve the following steps.

Digital Maturity Audit

The selected applicants will undergo a digital maturity review by Fáilte Ireland's procured technical consultants. Following this initial stage, each business will be provided with a unique digital roadmap and action plan, based on their current level of digital maturity and their specific requirements. This roadmap will identify the specific workstreams through which they will progress on their digital transformation journey.

Digital Roadmap & Programme Agreement

The Digital Roadmap will outline the requirements expected of businesses participating in the programme, including completion of all workstreams identified in the Roadmap to deliver the appropriate solution for their business/organisation. Each applicant will be supported by a dedicated project coordinator to keep them on track and address any issues they may encounter throughout their Just Transition Digital Transformation journey. Once applicants have approved and committed to the work in their roadmaps, they will start the process of completing their roadmap. Should an applicant not fulfil their obligations outlined in the roadmap for whatever reason, they will be ineligible for funding and funds provided/ costs incurred to date may be recoverable at Fáilte Ireland discretion.

Application for Investment Grant Aid

The applicant will be eligible to apply for investment grant aid funding once they receive and agree to the work outlined in their Digital Roadmap. The grant application will be based on the Roadmap and will be approved by the applicant's assigned project coordinator before the application for funding is submitted.

Letter of Offer and Implementation of Funded Solutions

Once the investment grant application is approved a Letter of Offer (or Investment Grant Agreement as required by Fáilte Ireland) will be issued to the business. Once the applicant has received and accepted the Letter of Offer, the applicant can then begin to implement the workstreams identified in their Roadmap. Full details of the grant claiming process will be provided with the Letter of Offer. The standard terms and conditions of an offer of funding from Fáilte Ireland are outlined in Appendix 3.

Capability Building

In addition to investment grant aid, the program will also involve capability building for each business. Each participant will be asked to undertake a digital competency assessment as part of the digital maturity audit. The assessment will produce a recommended learning pathway tailored to each businesses digital learning needs.

This Programme will involve engaging with expert-led training workshops and online learning supports across the two-year period. This aspect of the Programme also provides opportunities for networking and sharing experiences with other businesses on the Programme.

Applications for Project Category 5: Accessibility enhancements to provide a more inclusive visitor experience

The first step in the Application Process for Category 5 is to submit an Expression of Interest (EoI) form as outlined above.

Note to Applicants: Standalone Applications for Category 5

Where an applicant wishes to apply for funding for accessibility adaptations as part of a wider project of a type that is eligible for Category 1, 2 or 3, they will follow the process outlined above for Applications for Project Categories 1,2 and 3.

Where an applicant wishes to apply for funding for accessibility adaptations as a standalone project and will not be applying to Categories 1, 2 or 3, the following process applies.

Accessibility Audit

Proposals deemed eligible on the basis of the EoI form will be required to undertake an Accessibility Audit to determine what a business needs to implement to provide a more inclusive visitor experience. The accessibility audit will specify the accessibility and inclusivity improvements that will be required. The costs of the accessibility audit will be covered under this scheme and the audit will be undertaken by an Accessibility consultant appointed on behalf of Fáilte Ireland.

Application for Investment Grant Aid

Where an Accessibility Audit is deemed unnecessary by Fáilte Ireland, the applicant may proceed directly to the Application for Investment Grant Aid.

Where an Accessibility Audit has been required, the applicant will apply for grant funding once they receive their Accessibility Audit Report. The grant application will be based on the adaptations specified by the Audit Report and will be authorised by the applicant's assigned Accessibility Consultant before the application for funding is submitted.

Applications must be accompanied by the quotations for work which applicants will seek from suitably qualified third-party suppliers who will implement the specified work. In seeking quotes for work, applicants must adhere to public procurement rules (where applicable). The 'Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services' are available at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c23f5-public-procurement-guidelines-for-goods-and-services/>

Letter of Offer and implementation of funded solutions

If the Application is approved Fáilte Ireland will issue a Letter of Offer (or Investment Grant Agreement as required by Fáilte Ireland). Once the applicant has received and accepted the Letter of Offer, the applicant can then begin to implement their identified solution. Full details of the grant claiming process will be provided with the Letter of Offer. The applicant must provide appropriate evidence that the work has been completed in accordance with the Accessibility Audit, before submitting their final payment claim. The standard terms and conditions of an offer of funding from Fáilte Ireland are outlined in Appendix 3.

Capability Building

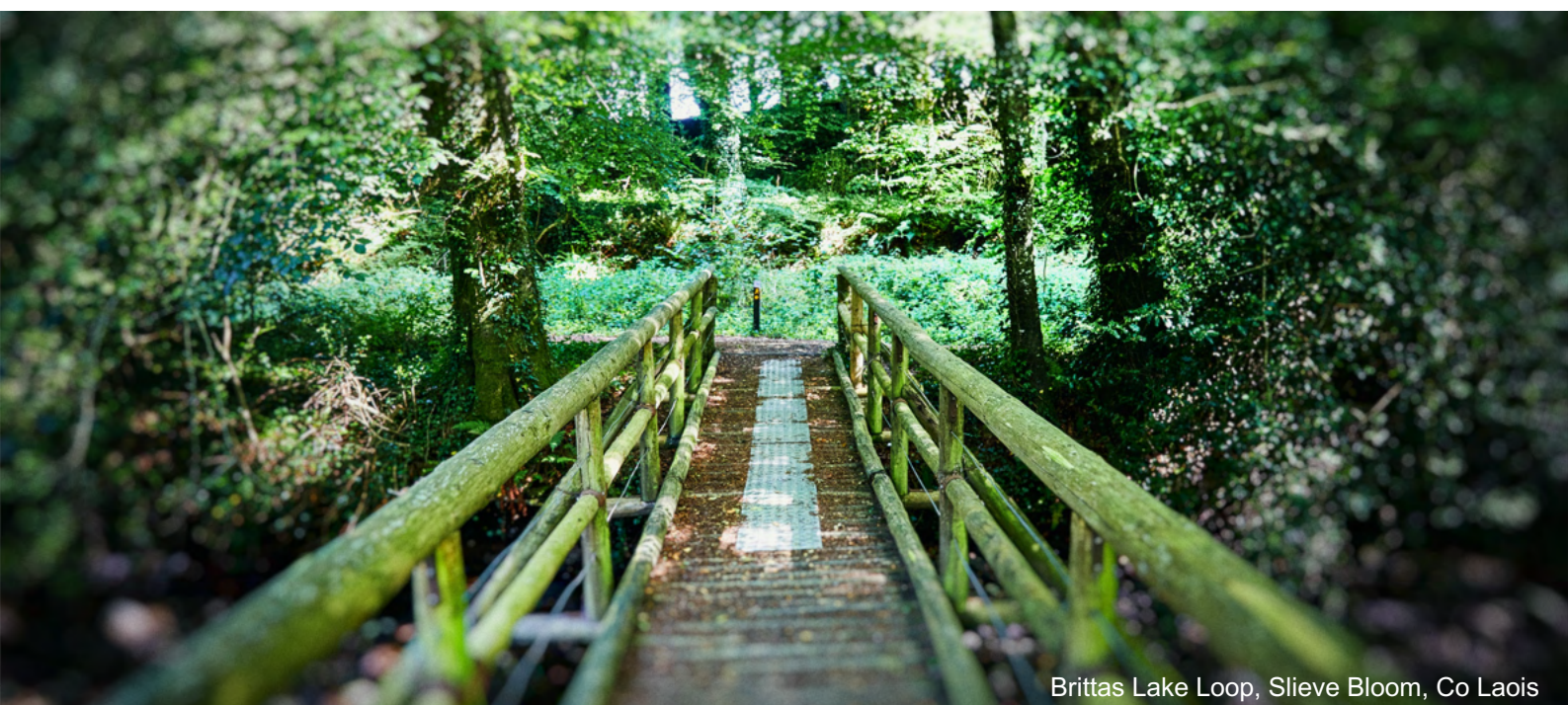
In addition to investment grant aid, the auditors report may recommend training of staff and/ or management. Any such training will be provided and funded by Fáilte Ireland through the Just Transition Tourism Learning Network under Scheme F – Enterprise Supports.

Appeals

Should an application (for any project Category) be rejected by Fáilte Ireland at application stage, the applicant may appeal this outcome as follows:

- **Engagement:** Before entering the appeals process, and within 6 months of receiving notification of the rejection, the Applicant should write to Fáilte Ireland about the unsuccessful project via email (justtransition@failteireland.ie) and seek further information and clarification with regard to their application.
- **Submitting an Appeal:** If, having discussed the outcome of an unsuccessful application with a member of Fáilte Ireland staff, the Applicant still wishes to appeal the decision, the applicant must write to the Appeals Officer at Fáilte Ireland within 1 month of that discussion with a member of Fáilte Ireland. The letter of appeal must state;
 - The grounds on which the applicant believes the application was not properly dealt with or assessed
 - Specific reasons or evidence the applicant may have to support the appeal
- **Validity of Appeal:** On receipt, the appeal will be checked to ensure it falls within the scope of this appeals process and that sufficient grounds for the appeal have been provided.
- **Appeal Review Process:** The appeal will be considered by the Appeals Officer in Fáilte Ireland. The decision of the Appeals Officer will be binding and will not be subject to any further appeals. Their conclusions and recommendations will be communicated to the applicant within seven working days of the Appeals Officer's decision. Where any delay is anticipated, the applicant will be informed in writing of the extended timescale.
- Fáilte Ireland will use reasonable endeavours to provide relevant information by way of reply, subject to data protection, commercial confidentiality, and other legal requirements as relevant.

Appeals will be handled as swiftly as possible and Fáilte Ireland will endeavour to provide a decision within 3 months of the initial engagement.



Brittas Lake Loop, Slieve Bloom, Co Laois

5. Contacts and Further Information

For further information on the Just Transition Regenerative Tourism Scheme, please visit www.Failteireland.ie/JustTransition

If have any queries relating to the EU Just Transition Fund Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026 please email CustomerSupport@failteireland.ie or call the Customer Support Team on 0818 888800.

An aerial photograph of Ireland with county boundaries and project codes overlaid in a light grey color. The map shows the following counties and their associated project codes: Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Mayo, Roscommon (R-2, R-3), Longford (LD-3, LD-2, LD-1), Westmeath (W-2, W-1), Meath, Galway (G-2), Offaly (O-3, O-2), Kildare (K-4), Laois (LS-1, LS-3, LS-2), Carlow, Clare, Tipperary (T-3, T-2), and Limerick. The project codes are distributed across the map, often following major roads or in specific regions.

Appendix 1: Eligible Projects and Eligible Expenditure

Category 1: Development or Enhancement of Sustainable Visitor Experiences

Category 1 includes the development of new or enhancement of existing;

1. Visitor Attractions (including those offering Heritage, Culture, Nature or provision of Outdoor Activity/ Outdoor Recreation).
2. Outdoor Activities and Experiences.
3. Stand-out features to enhance walking, cycling and water-based trails.
4. Infrastructure supporting access to water and visitor use of new or existing walking, cycling and water-based trails.
5. Start-up or expansion of Tourism SMEs in the JTF Area.

Category Specific Eligibility Requirements

In addition to the overarching eligibility criteria for this Investment Grant Scheme, the following requirements apply to this category:

1. **Planning Approval:** Only projects which, at the point of application, are not subject to planning approval and statutory consents or which have already secured any required planning approval and statutory consents are eligible to apply under Category 1.
2. **Legal right to Undertake the Project:** The applicant must have the legal right to undertake the project at the proposed site/location. They must either;
 - a) own the land or
 - b) have a lease of acceptable duration at the point of application (to include both the development and the first 10 years of the operational period at least).
 - c) Provide a letter of comfort from the landowner, to the satisfaction of Fáilte Ireland.
3. **Sustainability and Regenerative Tourism:** All applicants will be required to commit to developing and delivering their projects in a way that will contribute to the promotion of sustainable development and regenerative tourism including, as relevant, ensuring their project;
 - a) has a low or zero carbon footprint;
 - b) contributes to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems;
 - c) ensures the sustainable use and protection of water resources;
 - d) contributes to the circular economy where appropriate, including waste prevention and recycling, pollution prevention and control to air, water, and land, and;
 - e) contributes to the regeneration of local communities;
 - f) as a condition of any funding offered, all applicants will be required to measure their carbon footprint before and after development and pursue sustainability certification.
1. 4) **Clustering;** To be eligible for support under this Category, projects will need to outline how they will contribute to the development of viable tourism destinations (i.e. towns and villages with an adequate cluster of tourism and hospitality enterprises, services and infrastructure to meet the needs of visitors).

Eligible Projects

Project Type 1 - Visitor Attractions

Development of new or enhancement of existing Visitor Attractions, including those based on;

- **Heritage and Culture;** located at or near sites of heritage or cultural significance.
- **Nature and Landscape;** providing visitors with improved physical and intellectual access to landscapes and nature, in a sustainable way that seeks to improve the quality of the natural asset, leading to a **greater understanding of nature by the visitor.**
- **Outdoor Activities/ outdoor recreation.**

Visitor attractions must be permanently established destinations which are capable of attracting day visitors or tourists and open to the public a minimum of 120 days per year.

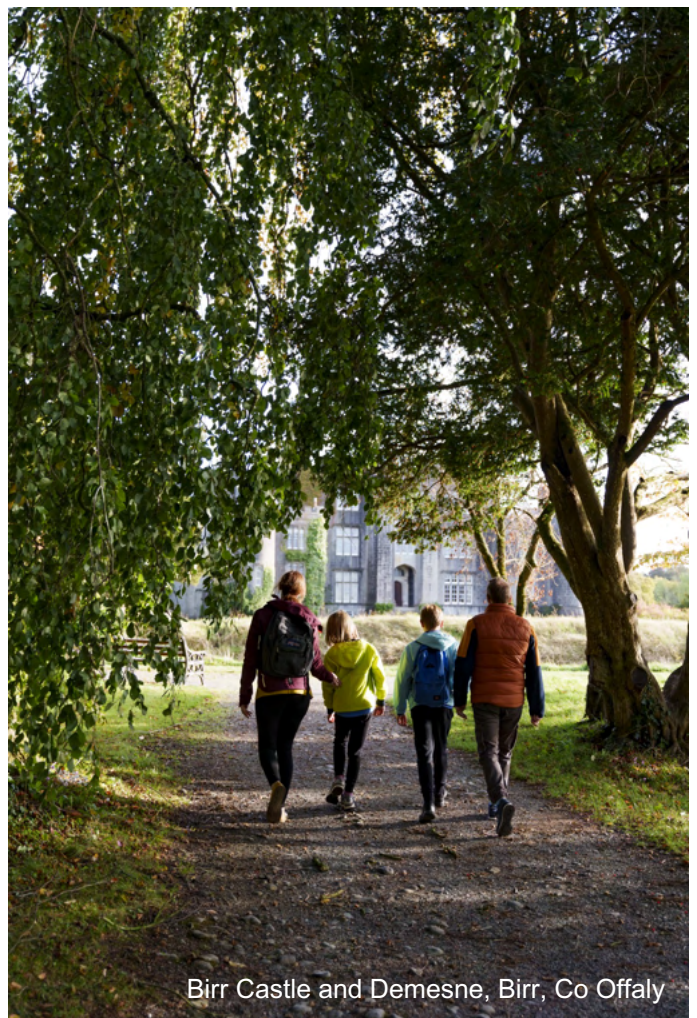
The primary purpose of the attraction should be sightseeing and/ or recreation, and either offer guided tours, have a visitor centre/ visitor facilities or be capable of offering a ticketed element for visitors.

Digital projects and interventions using technology, such as virtual reality and augmented reality, to deliver step change improvements in the quality and accessibility of the visitor experience for all, are also eligible.

Note: Attractions whose primary purpose is not tourism, e.g., places of worship, manufacturing, agriculture, retail or venues for sporting, theatrical, educational or film performances must

be capable of offering a ticketed element for a visitor and attracting a minimum of €50,000 in tourism admissions⁶ revenue to be eligible to apply.

Note; It will be entirely at Fáilte Ireland's discretion whether the project site proposed will be deemed acceptable/ eligible as a Heritage, Culture, Nature or Outdoor Activity based Attraction.



Birr Castle and Demesne, Birr, Co Offaly

6. Direct revenue from domestic and international visitors. This figure will be excluding revenue from locals and exclude all secondary revenue sources such as retail, events and catering etc.

Eligible Projects (continued)

Project Type 2 - Outdoor Activity Providers/ Operators

Business expansion or business start-up by outdoor activity operators whose business is, providing instructor-led sessions or equipment rental in a wide variety of outdoor activities for visitors and where the outdoor activity is not ordinarily carried on from a business premises are eligible to apply if the activity itself will be located within the Just Transition Area.

Examples of the type of experiences/ activities we seek to support under this category may include but are not limited to;

- Sight-seeing tours
- Guided Nature Tours (e.g. Raised Bog Habitat Tour, Wildlife Tour, Guided Bird watching)
- Canoeing, Kayaking, Stand up paddle boarding;
- Cycling/ guided bicycle tours;
- Angling;
- Falconry;
- Horse drawn tours & horse trekking;
- Kitesurfing;
- Orienteering;
- Guided walking tours,
- Zip line/ High Wires,
- Water trampoline
- Outdoor Bathing
- Foraging;
- Dark Skies experiences:
- Educational Holidays/ Day excursions in Art, Photography, Nature, Gardening
- Health & Wellness Experiences in the outdoors, e.g. forest bathing

- Digital projects and interventions using technology, such as virtual reality and augmented reality, to deliver step change improvements in the quality and accessibility of the visitor experience for all, are also eligible.

Project Type 3 - Development of Stand-Out features to enhance walking, cycling and water-based trails

Fáilte Ireland's long-term ambitions for the midlands include an expanded trail network that will transform existing routes from the industrial age and forge new paths on land and over water. This network of trails will encourage visitors to get curious about every part of the region. Plugged into the network of trails, the visitor should find an inviting web of inspiring and accessible visitor attractions, activities and experiences.

Fáilte Ireland invites proposals for ambitious, transformative projects that can add a wow factor to the visitor experience of the emerging trail network.

The possibilities are limited only by the requirement that the features proposed be accessible from the trail network and add to the Visitor experience of that Trail network. For example, projects may include development of major new sculptural features, renovation/ reuse/ upcycling of industrial heritage features, creation of access to spectacular natural features.

Digital projects which propose to enhance the visitor experience of trails will also be considered.

Eligible Projects (continued)

Project Type 4 - Infrastructure enabling visitor access to water and visitor use of new or existing walking, cycling and water-based trails

Infrastructure enabling visitor access to water that is universally accessible and available to multiple operators not a single operator:

- Harbours;
- Piers;
- Slipways;
- Jetties;
- Pontoons;
- Lidos;
- Outdoor Activity Centres

Visitor services hub / Trailhead centres (Comfort Enhancement on Trails)

Project Type 5 - Start-up or expansion of Tourism SMEs in the JTF Area

Start-up or expansion of Tourism SMEs in the Just Transition territory which either:

- Improves the Visitor Experience of town or village centres through the repurposing of buildings of significant heritage value (or significant value to the appearance of the town centre), or;
- Improves the visitor experience along Greenways, Blueways, walking & cycling trails.

The type of business/ activity envisaged here will include start up or expansion of:

- Provision of new café / refreshment facilities along Greenways, Blueways, walking & cycling trails, and in towns and villages where no café facilities exist already.
- Start up or expansion of operations to enable increased tourism business by;

- Food Tourism Providers
- Local Craft Producers

Eligible Expenditure

Note to Applicants: The following lists of eligible expenditure are specific to this Category only and should be read in conjunction with the notes on Eligible Expenditure in Section 2 above.

All planning, design, construction, fit out and project management costs deemed essential to the approved project, which may include the following elements.

New Visitor centre / upgrades to existing Visitor Centre, including but not limited to;

- New features/ attractions
- Indoor or outdoor interpretation (including all digital, static, tactile interpretation
- and including props, costumes, scripts etc)
- Indoor or outdoor orientation signage
- Public Art / Sculpture Trail
- Outdoor playground
- Ecologically sensitive landscaping works to improve the visitor experience of outdoor areas
- Lighting to allow the use of outdoor spaces in the evening. Such lighting should be designed so that it does not impact negatively on wildlife, e.g., bats.
- Toilets
- Accessibility enhancements/ adaptations and access information for all
- Selective conservation / repurposing of buildings where essential to the visitor experience or to accommodate the commercial infrastructure listed below.

Ancillary Facilities;

All costs deemed essential to the development of ancillary facilities, where such are agreed by Fáilte Ireland to be essential, including the following elements for example;

- Ticketing offices; waiting area/reception; facilities, etc.
- Pathways and access roads
- Vehicle & Pedestrian Bridges
- Car, Coach and Bike parking facilities and upgrades including charging points
- Directional Signage
- Outdoor interpretation / orientation
- Toilets
- Accessibility enhancements/ adaptations

Commercial infrastructure (to support the financial sustainability and visitor experience of the Attraction) including but not limited to;

- Café (including addition of outdoor dining)
- Retail space
- Events Space (indoors & outdoors)
- **Please Note;** Website upgrade and Online Booking Systems / Visitor Revenue Management System are eligible under Category 4 only. Please follow the Category 4 Application process for these items.

Project expenditure on elements specifically designed to restore, protect and support habitats and biodiversity

- habitat restoration
- rewilding
- native species planting
- creation of nature rich and pollinator rich areas
- other measures as appropriate

Project expenditure on elements specifically designed to minimise carbon emissions

- Energy efficiency measures (where SEAI grants are not available)
- Funding towards actions needed to attain green certification
- Bicycle stands
- EV Charging points

Project expenditure on elements specifically designed to enable visitor access to Nature and landscape including, but not limited to;

- Viewing Points/ viewing towers
- Trail development
- Bird hide / bird watching infrastructure
- Educational elements
- Equipment (e.g. wet weather apparel, binoculars for visitors)
- Vehicles, boats, bikes where justified

Project expenditure on elements specifically related to provision for Outdoor Activities/ Outdoor Adventure including, but not limited to;

- Infrastructure
 - Outdoor artificial wave course
 - access roads/ trails
 - slipways
 - shelters for visitors/ staff/ equipment
 - playgrounds
 - on-water/ floating recreational infrastructure
 - Service Block to include changing Rooms, showers etc.
 - Secure Parking for bikes, Canoes/Kayak Racks, Hose Down Facilities
- Equipment
 - Wetsuits
 - Wet weather apparel
 - Safety equipment
 - Bikes
 - Boats, Kayaks, Boards;
 - Zip line, High Wires, harnesses
 - Water trampoline and associated safety materials
 - Vehicles for transporting visitors, where justified
 - Accessibility equipment e.g. Harnesses, outriggers etc.

Applicants please note; movable assets funded through this scheme such as those outlined above must be kept on site & maintained for the agreed operational period. Audits can occur at any time.

Category 2: Development of Sustainable/ Low Carbon Tourist Accommodation

Within the Just Transition region, it is recognised that the Visitor Accommodation sector is less developed than other more mature tourism destinations, this category is focused on widening the diversity of accommodation options available to visitors.

Under Category 2, Fáilte Ireland will provide support for the development of new and additional small-scale sustainable Tourist Accommodation which;

- demonstrates innovation by allowing visitors memorable experiences of connecting with nature, or;
- demonstrates excellence in terms of sustainable design, construction and operation, or;
- breathes new life into town and village centres by repurposing vacant buildings of significant heritage value (or significant value to the appearance of the town centre).

Category Specific Eligibility Requirements

In addition to the overarching eligibility criteria for this Investment Grant Scheme, the following requirements apply to this category. At the point of Application, the Applicant will need to provide evidence they satisfy the following criteria:

1. The project will not cause displacement
2. Projects will deliver a minimum of 4 new and additional bedspaces.
3. All units will have access to appropriate ensuite or bathroom facilities
4. **Planning Approval:** Only projects which, at the point of application, are not subject to planning approval and statutory consents or which have already secured any required planning approval and statutory consents are eligible to apply under Category 2.
5. **Legal right to Undertake the Project:** The applicant must have the legal right to

undertake the project at the proposed site/location. They must either;

- a) own the land or
 - b) have a lease of acceptable duration at the point of application (to include both the development and the first 10 years of the operational period at least).
 - c) Provide a letter of comfort from the landowner to the satisfaction of Fáilte Ireland.
6. Developments must meet building regulations, including those relating to accessibility.
- 7. Sustainability and Regenerative Tourism:** All applicants will be required to commit to developing and delivering their projects in a way that will contribute to the promotion of sustainable development and regenerative tourism including, as relevant, ensuring their project;
- a) has a low or zero carbon footprint;
 - b) contributes to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems;
 - c) ensures the sustainable use and protection of water resources;
 - d) contributes to the circular economy where appropriate, including waste prevention and recycling, pollution prevention and control to air, water, and land, and;
 - e) contributes to the regeneration of local communities;
 - f) as a condition of any funding offered, all applicants will be required to measure their carbon footprint before and after development and pursue sustainability certification.
- 8. Clustering;** To be eligible for support under this Category, projects will need to outline how they will contribute to the development of viable tourism destinations (i.e. towns and villages with an adequate cluster of tourism and hospitality enterprises, services and infrastructure to meet the needs of visitors).

Following development and before drawing down the final grant claim;

9. Accommodation developed must be open to bookings by the public a minimum of 220 days per year and must only be used for short-term Tourist accommodation.
10. The accommodation must be registered, when completed, under the Fáilte Ireland National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF). It must be designed and developed to ensure it can be registered under the appropriate accommodation category.

The following additional criteria apply to all applications for town/ village centre developments (Project Type 2 below)

11. The proposed building must be in a village or town centre and must be listed on the Local Authority's Record of Protected Structures (RPS) or be of significant value to the appearance of the town centre.
12. One of the accommodation units (or 10% whichever is greater) must be universally accessible.
13. Projects that are eligible for the vacant property refurbishment grant will not be eligible.

Eligible Project Types

Project Type 1 - Sustainable Rural Tourist Accommodation

Development of bespoke alternative sustainable accommodation experiences in rural areas where visitors will be able to reconnect with nature. Examples of the type of accommodation we seek to support under this category may include but are not limited to;

- Bespoke modular accommodation units (e.g.

cabins, eco pods, yurts, shepherds' huts, treehouses and other forms of innovative accommodation units)

- Additional accommodation capacity in existing registered caravan /camping and glamping National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) sites

Project Type 2 - Sustainable Town Centre Tourist Accommodation in Heritage Buildings

The focus of this Project Type is on increasing the tourism accommodation supply while at the same time improving the visitor experience of town or village centres through the repurposing of buildings of significant heritage value.

The proposed building must be in a village or town centre and must be listed on the Local Authority's Record of Protected Structures (RPS) or be of significant value to the appearance of the town centre.

One of the accommodation units (or 10% of all units whichever is greater) must be universally accessible.

Ineligible Projects

The following project types will not be funded through this scheme. This is not an exhaustive list:

- Non-tourism static mobile homes
- Renovation and refurbishment projects for existing accommodation capacity
- Projects that are eligible for the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant
- Extensions to existing bedroom supply within existing hotels, Guesthouses, B&Bs

Eligible Expenditure

Note to Applicants: *The following list of eligible expenditure is specific to this Category only and should be read in conjunction with the notes on Eligible Expenditure in Section 2 above.*

All planning, design, construction and fit out costs deemed essential to the approved project, which may include the following elements

- The capital cost of acquiring the accommodation product (Project Type 1 only)
- Repurposing of existing buildings in line with building standards for small scale tourist accommodation to provide accommodation units (Project Type 2 only)
- Modular unit transportation costs to site (one off set up)
- Other reasonable project specific set up costs (by prior agreement with Fáilte Ireland)
- Infrastructure or enabling works (for new accommodation units only)
 - Site enabling works
 - Pathways and roadways
 - Service Block to include changing rooms, showers etc.
 - playgrounds
- Accessibility - Appropriate provisions to ensure access understanding and use to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size or disability.

Project expenditure on elements specifically designed to restore, protect and support habitats and biodiversity

- habitat restoration
- rewilding
- native species planting
- creation of nature rich and pollinator rich areas
- other measures as appropriate

Project expenditure on elements specifically designed to minimise carbon emissions

- Energy efficiency measures (where SEAI grants are not available)
- Funding towards actions needed to attain green certification
- Bicycle stands
- Electric Charging points
- Sustainable approach to design and delivery

Commercial infrastructure (to support the financial sustainability and visitor experience of the site) including but not limited to;

- Events Space (indoors & outdoors)
- **Please Note;** Website upgrade and Online Booking Systems / Visitor Revenue Management System are eligible under Category 4 only. Please follow the Category 4 Application process for these items.

Category 3: Capital Projects – Planning and Design

Under Category 3, Fáilte Ireland may provide support towards the cost of the planning and design stages, of a limited number of significant Tourism Capital Developments that have not yet secured planning approval and/ or may not be delivered before August 2026.

Projects which secure planning approval and all other statutory consents required may then be eligible to apply again under either Category 1 or 2 above if the project can be completed by August 2026.

Category Specific Eligibility Requirements

In addition to the overarching eligibility criteria for this Investment Grant Scheme, the following requirements apply to this category;

1. **Must demonstrate Economic Development Potential;** Please note only those projects which have potential, in the view of Fáilte Ireland, to make a significant contribution to tourism and economic development and achieving the objectives and vision of the Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme will be deemed eligible under Category 3.
2. **Legal right to Undertake the Project;** The applicant must have the legal right to undertake the project at the proposed site/location. They must either;
 - a) own the land or
 - b) have a lease of acceptable duration at the point of application (to include both the development and the first 10 years of the operational period at least).
 - c) Provide a letter of comfort from the landowner, to the satisfaction of Fáilte Ireland.
3. **Sustainability and Regenerative Tourism:** All applicants will be required to commit to developing and delivering their projects in a way that will contribute to the promotion of sustainable development and regenerative tourism including, as relevant, ensuring their project;
 - a) has a low or zero carbon footprint;
 - b) contributes to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems;
 - c) ensures the sustainable use and protection of water resources;
 - d) contributes to the circular economy where appropriate, including waste prevention and recycling, pollution prevention and control to air, water, and land, and;
 - e) contributes to the regeneration of local communities;
 - f) as a condition of any funding offered, all applicants will be required to measure their carbon footprint before and after development and pursue sustainability certification.
4. **Clustering;** To be eligible for support under this Category, projects will need to outline how they will contribute to the development of viable tourism destinations (i.e. towns and villages with an adequate cluster of tourism and hospitality enterprises, services and infrastructure to meet the needs of visitors).

Eligible Expenditure

Note to Applicants: The following list of eligible expenditure is specific to this Category only and should be read in conjunction with the notes on Eligible Expenditure in Section 2 above.

Costs that may be supported under Category 3 will include professional fees involved in;

- Concept Development
- Feasibility Study
- Market research/ Consumer research
- Design Fees (Architects, Engineer, Interior design, Horticultural/ Outdoor amenity design, Exhibition design/ Interpretive design)
- Quantity Surveyor fees and costing
- High level / Outline Business Plan/ Commercialisation Plan
- Project Management
- Environmental Screening & Impact Assessment.

Category 4: Digital Transformation

To enable tourism businesses (see eligible business types below) in the Just Transition Area deliver a step-change in the efficiency of their key business processes, unlock greater productivity and enable improved financial outcomes, Fáilte Ireland will introduce a Digital Transformation Programme for businesses that will see it fund investment in website development, destination content development, booking engines, connected distribution, CRM systems, personalisation of marketing activity, automated marketing software and AI applications. The extent of the supports to be delivered to individual businesses will be determined via a digital maturity audit of eligible applicants.

Category Specific Eligibility Requirements:

In addition to the overarching eligibility criteria for this Investment Grant Scheme, the following requirements apply to this category;

1. Businesses which have previously been involved in Fáilte Ireland's Digital That Delivers Programme are not eligible to apply.
2. To make the most of this opportunity and grow your business, you will have to allocate a certain number of hours every week to gain valuable digital skills for you and your team and implement the recommended technology and actions as determined by your tailored roadmap. While the Just Transition Digital Transformation Programme team is flexible to work with you around peak season and busy periods, a level of commitment on your part is still required.
3. As part of this investment programme, Fáilte Ireland will seek to gather accurate and robust data relating to visitor numbers and

other key indicators for the applicant's business/organisation to support our investment analysis work. By participating in the programme the applicant is agreeing, if approved for funding, to provide visitor performance and digital engagement data to Fáilte Ireland for an operational period of up to 10 years from the date of the last grant instalment being paid and that the applicant will work with Fáilte Ireland to ensure this data is reported on in a timely manner. All data collected will be anonymised to comply with- GDPR rules.

How the Digital Transformation programme will be delivered:

The program will be delivered over a two-year period and will be conducted remotely by Fáilte Ireland's procured technical consultants and leading subject matter experts. Businesses will have the opportunity to participate in multiple digital workstreams, receive one-to-one support, and access to expert training, and ongoing advice, alongside the financial assistance provided by the investment grant aid.

What can I expect for my business?

- A bespoke digital transformation roadmap and action plan
- One-to-one expert support
- Supercharged digital skills for you and your team
- Investment grant aid to deliver digital transformation across, websites, booking engines, digital marketing, and data and insights.
- Capability building to provide training for all aspects of the programme
- Enhanced Digital Marketing strategies

Digital Transformation Programme Workstreams

The Just Transition Digital Transformation Programme will support a range of digital transformation activities including website development, destination content development, booking engines, connected distribution, CRM systems, personalisation of marketing activity, automated marketing software and AI applications. The extent of the supports to be delivered to each individual business will be determined via a digital maturity audit of eligible applicants, which will recommend a number of suitable digital workstreams for each business to participate in. See below a sample list of workstreams to be included in the program:

- **Booking Systems** – Businesses with no booking system in place or who use booking systems with no connectivity will be supported to select and activate a connected online booking system. Businesses with connected online booking systems already in place will be supported to activate new distribution channels, to use their booking system for all of their distribution, and to join connected distribution networks.
- **Website** – Businesses identified as having websites that require improvement or replacement, will receive support to enhance design, functionality and usability of the websites. They will also receive support to develop best-in-class relevant and engaging content to better promote their direct and social channels.
- **Digital Marketing** – Businesses will receive support to develop their digital marketing strategies and capabilities, improving the visibility and prominence of their brand website and social channels.
- **Data** – Businesses will be supported with correct website analytics set-up (GA4) to enable more accurate data measurement. They will receive training on how to use these

tools, enabling them to make informed data-led decisions for their businesses.

Eligible Business Types

The Digital Transformation programme is open to visitor experiences, accommodation providers, golf courses and destination marketing organisations as outlined below:

Visitor Experiences:

As defined in Fáilte Ireland's National Online Distribution Strategy (NODS), the term 'visitor experiences' refers to a category of travel product that includes attractions, activities, and day tours.

- **Attractions:** Places that offer visitors interesting things to see or do and that are subject to admission fees or other conditions of entry. Includes:
 - a) Museums, galleries, and other cultural attractions
 - b) Castles, cathedrals, and other heritage attractions
 - c) National parks, gardens, zoos, pet farms or other outdoor and natural attractions
 - d) Theme parks, escape rooms, distilleries, and other commercial visitor attractions
- **Activities:** Activities involve visitors as active participants in an experience and may require special equipment, skills, or attributes – or involve a degree of risk. They include:
 - a) Water, land, or air-based activities such as kayaking, hiking, or skydiving
 - b) 'Making' activities such as painting, basket-weaving, or pottery
 - c) Learning activities such as talks or workshops (though not multi-day courses)
- **Day Tours:** Day tours are guided or self-guided visits that may take in several attractions, activities, or points of interest within a 24-hour period.

Accommodation providers included:

- Registered or approved (or in application) under Fáilte Ireland's National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) as of September 2023 including; Hotels, Guest houses, Holiday Hostel, Youth Hostels, Caravan & Camping Parks, Self-Catering, Holiday Camps, B&Bs, Historic Houses, Self-Catering Activity Holiday Accommodation, Camping, Glamping, Hostel, Cruise Hire.

Accommodation providers not included (ineligible)

- Campus Accommodation and Student Accommodation: On the basis that this accommodation is not primarily available for tourist use. this accommodation category is ineligible.
- Public Bodies: Any business that is owned and operated by, or in receipt of funding from public bodies is ineligible to apply
- Property Marketing Companies, Groups or Organisations

Golf Courses:

Golf properties with a minimum of 18 holes and which meet at least one of the following criteria, will be eligible to apply for support under this Category:

- Have engaged with one of Fáilte Ireland's sales platforms between and including the years 2022 & 2023, such as but not limited to, Belfast Golf Promotion, PGA Merchandise Show, IGTM etc.
- Have attended annual IGTOA conferences between the years 2022 & 2023 inclusive.
- Be a member of

www.golfinirelandshiddenheartlands.ie

Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs):

Those located in the Just Transition Territory with an existing website.

Eligible Expenditure

- Purchase of necessary hardware and equipment
- Design, activation, enhancement, upgrade and configuration of a connected online booking system
- Integration of booking system and/or website with other systems
- Website design, development, set-up and optimisation, including reporting and analytics
- Digital strategy design
- Once-off SEO implementation
- Copywriting, Photography & Videography
- Content Strategy Design
- Content Creation Hardware
- Software for activation and implementation of chatbot and AI voice assistant technology
- Hardware and software for implementation and integration of CRM systems

Ineligible Expenditure

As part of the Just Transition Digital Transformation Programme the following elements will not be funded:

- Costs which are related to work that was not agreed as part of the grant application process.
- Costs not associated with the recommendations identified in the applicant's roadmap
- Costs incurred after the completion date as stated in the Investment Grant Agreement
- Internal staff wages or costs for time spent on the project (including staff training costs)
- Ongoing / recurring hosting fees or any other ongoing website / system management costs
- Purchase of online or digital marketing or advertising campaigns (including start-up marketing activity)
- Payment / credit card transaction fees charged by a vendor
- Ongoing / recurring costs for support and maintenance (including equipment replacement expenses)
- Ongoing / recurring costs for licenses or subscriptions
- Clothing
- Travel and accommodation expenses
- Printed materials
- Financing costs (including bank interest and charges)
- Fines, penalty payments, legal costs, audit fees, insurances
- Operational costs
- Recoverable VAT



Fore Abbey, Co. Westmeath

Category 5: Accessibility enhancements to provide a more inclusive visitor experience

Under Category 5 Fáilte Ireland will support tourism and hospitality businesses (accommodation, visitor experiences, attractions, activity providers and day tours, full-service restaurants, hotel restaurants and gastropubs) in the Just Transition territory to ensure a more inclusive visitor experience by:

- Improving the physical accessibility of indoor and outdoor visitor experiences and the accessibility of visitor services, including transportation, dining, activities entertainment and accommodation;
- Improving the provision of access information, including online and offline access information guides and trip planning tools as well as accessible booking and payment systems and web accessibility in accordance with WCAG 2.2. (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).

Fáilte Ireland has developed a number of online resources to introduce the area of accessibility. Including an outline of an accessible tourism customer journey, video case studies on good practice advice on key legislation in this area while offering practical low-cost and no-cost tips to get started. See <https://supports.Failteireland.ie/courses/accessible-tourism>

Category Specific Eligibility Requirements

In addition to the overarching eligibility criteria for this Investment Grant Scheme, the following requirements apply to this category:

1. Applicants may be required to undertake an accessibility audit of their business. The accessibility audit will specify the accessibility and inclusivity improvements that will be required. The costs of the accessibility audit will be covered under this scheme and the audit will be undertaken by an Accessibility consultant appointed on behalf of Fáilte Ireland;
2. Following development and before drawing down the final grant claim;
 - a) applicants will be required to have an

- a) accessibility statement on their website
- b) the Applicant's website will need to be WCAG 2.1 compliant

3. Accommodation providers include: Registered or approved (or in application) under Fáilte Ireland's National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) as of September 2023 including; Hotels, Guest houses, Holiday Hostel, Youth Hostels, Caravan & Camping Parks, Self-Catering, Holiday Camps, B&Bs, Historic Houses, Self-Catering Activity Holiday Accommodation, Camping, Glamping, Hostel, Cruise Hire.

Eligible Projects

Under Category 5 Fáilte Ireland will support tourism and hospitality businesses (accommodation, visitor experiences, attractions, activity providers and day tours, full-service restaurants, hotel restaurants and gastropubs) in the Just Transition territory to ensure a more inclusive visitor experience by:

- Improving the physical accessibility of indoor and outdoor visitor experiences and the accessibility of visitor services, including transportation, dining, activities, entertainment and accommodation;
- Improving the provision of access information, including online and offline access information guides and trip planning tools;
- Providing accessible booking and payment systems and web accessibility in accordance with WCAG 2.2. (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).
- Provision of accessible toilets, changing places, sensory rooms, quiet spaces etc.

Fáilte Ireland has developed a number of online resources to introduce the area of accessibility. Including an outline of an accessible tourism customer journey, video case studies on good practice advice on key legislation in this area while offering practical low-cost and no-cost tips to get started.

See

<https://supports.Failteireland.ie/courses/accessible-tourism>

Eligible Expenditure

Note to Applicants: The following lists of eligible expenditure are specific to this Category only and should be read in conjunction with the notes on Eligible Expenditure in Section 2 above.

The following list is indicative only. In general, all measures recommended by the Accessibility Audit will be eligible for funding:

- Design and construction cost of additions, enhancements and modifications to and within buildings to ensure improved access to indoor and outdoor spaces.
- Addition of accessible [accommodation bedrooms and bathrooms](#) based on [Universal Design principals](#), to include for provision of interconnecting accessible rooms where possible, ceiling track hoists etc.
- Improving the provision of access information, including online and offline access information guides and trip planning tools;
- Providing accessible booking and payment systems and web accessibility in accordance with WCAG 2.2. (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).
- Accessible/adaptive equipment suitable for indoor and outdoor spaces, such as;
 - mobility scooters, off road mobility vehicles, accessible bikes and trikes suitable for mixed outdoor terrain, adapted transport; only for use the within the defined grant-aided premises and/or for the provision for the specified grant-aided outdoor activity
 - adaptive equipment including harnesses and hoists, adaptive water-based

equipment

- ramps, platforms and stairlifts to support access to indoor spaces and on/in water activities;
- access equipment for indoor and outdoor spaces;
- accessible toilets and/or Changing Places designed facility;
- adaptive and assistive digital technology to support more accessible communications, maximise the visitor experience and emergency communications for guests;
- accessible wayfinding signage.
- Accessible Interpretative mobile equipment
- Adaptive seating & tables for accessible dining
- Height adjustable tables and beds in accessible rooms, ceiling track hoists, changing beds, keyless entry etc
- sensory friendly environments and spaces;

In addition, Fáilte Ireland will fund the following directly;

- Access Audit to inform access improvement plans and investment priorities
- Staff training in access and management, accessible customer service for front of house teams.

Appendix 2: Ineligible Applicants

Where any of the following is applicable, the applicant will be regarded as ineligible for the Investment Grant Scheme:

- Aid to undertakings in difficulty details of which are set out in the Fáilte Ireland State Aid Handbook;
- Aid in favour of an undertaking which is subject to an outstanding recovery order following a previous European Commission decision declaring an aid illegal and incompatible with the internal market;
- Applicants that are not tax compliant are not eligible and applicants will be required to demonstrate evidence of tax compliance
- Applicants that are not in a position to establish that they either (a) own the project site or (b) have the right to undertake the proposed project on the identified site;
- Applicants that are not the organisation or individual through which all grant-aided expenditure on the project will be made. (i.e., Entities that are not the grantee of the aid);
- Applicants that have been in breach of a material provision of a previous grant agreement. For these purposes, the applicant shall be deemed to include:
 - any other enterprise so in breach that was previously in receipt of funding and which either as of the date of the previous grant agreement or as of the date of an application under this scheme formed or forms part of 'single undertaking' (within the meaning of Article 2 (2) of Commission Regulation No. 1407/2013) with or in relation to the current applicant; and
 - any person who is or was a director, officer, shareholder (with a shareholding of at least 10%) or interest holder (being in the nature of any right to at least 10% of any profits) of or in any enterprise that is or was so in breach, or of any other enterprise, which with or in respect of the former, forms part of a 'single enterprise' in accordance with (i) and which was so in breach.



Lough Boora Discovery Park, Tullamore, Co Offaly

Appendix 3: Terms & Conditions

Applicants are asked to read the terms and conditions of grant funding before applying for the Scheme.

The following terms and conditions apply to all Applicants and Grantees

- All Applications for funding under the Scheme will be reviewed and assessed by Fáilte Ireland to ensure eligibility.
- All funding approved under the Scheme is subject to audit.
- Fáilte Ireland may make any enquiries that it considers necessary to establish the Applicant's eligibility for funding under the Scheme, and Fáilte Ireland's decisions in relation to Applicant eligibility and the disbursement of monies are at the absolute discretion of Fáilte Ireland and are final.
- Incomplete applications will not be assessed until all required information is received. Fáilte Ireland will assess complete applications in order of receipt
- While Fáilte Ireland will assess complete Applications received in the order that they have been submitted, Applicants are advised that the assessment of Applications for projects that are more complex, larger in terms of the funding requirement, require more interaction with the Applicant or more verification by Fáilte Ireland will take longer. In the event of any delay to the assessment of an Application, there will be no liability on the part of Fáilte Ireland or the Irish State to make good any loss or damage suffered, or shortfall experienced by Applicants.
- The submission of an Application should not be construed as granting any rights or expectations of funding to the Applicant.
- If an Applicant is successful in securing an offer of funding but is later found to be in breach of the terms and conditions of the Scheme or has provided any false or inaccurate information as part of the Application process, it will be required to pay back the grant with interest and any applicable recovery costs, in accordance with State Aid rules.
- The timing of grant payments under the Scheme is subject to Fáilte Ireland being in receipt of sufficient funding from the Irish State to meet those payments. In the event of any unavailability or delay, there will be no liability on the part of Fáilte Ireland or the Irish State to make good any loss or damage suffered, or shortfall experienced by Applicants.
- Applicants are encouraged to carefully review, consider, and adhere to these terms and conditions, together with the eligibility criteria of the Scheme for the purposes of State Aid compliance. Applicants should exercise particular care where they are in receipt of other State Funding and seek professional advice where appropriate.
- That the Applicant is and will continue to be at all times fully compliant with all relevant legal obligations where applicable including, but not limited to, any in regard to employment, planning, the environment, taxation, child protection, equality of opportunity, the nine grounds of discrimination under the Equal Status Act 2000, local authority and industry requirements and any other requirements under Irish or EU law., including but not limited to the General Block Exemption Regulation, Just Transition Regulation, the Common Provisions Regulations and the De Minimis Regulation where relevant.

Freedom of Information

Fáilte Ireland may be required to disclose, in connection with the Scheme, (a) any information supplied by the Applicant to Fáilte Ireland and (b) any relevant data accumulated by Fáilte Ireland in administering the Scheme, except where the information is considered to be commercially sensitive. Fáilte Ireland will contact the Applicant in this regard in advance; however, Fáilte Ireland may still decide to release this information if required by law.

Data Protection

Both the Applicant and Fáilte Ireland shall have regard to their statutory obligations under the GDPR (2016/679) and the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018. In this regard, in so far as the Applicant processes personal data for the purpose of this Application it shall comply with its obligations as a “data controller” under the GDPR.

Personal data supplied to Fáilte Ireland in relation to the Just Transition Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme for Ireland’s Midlands 2021-2027 and the Applicant may be processed by Fáilte Ireland for the purposes of the administration of the Scheme.

Fáilte Ireland will be sharing information provided in the Application form or pursuant to the Scheme with Government Departments and/or Government Agencies, in the event that information is required from those organisations to ensure compliance with State aid and national legislation requirements. Our lawful basis for processing your personal data is ‘Legal Obligation’ as public funding may be provided and we must adhere to EU State Aid and other applicable Law. We are also using the lawful basis of ‘Purpose of a Contract’ because the successful Applicants will be issued with an investment grant agreement.

In addition, Fáilte Ireland’s statutory purpose, under the National Tourism Development Authority Act, 2003 is to develop and promote Ireland’s tourism industry, which includes helping to develop and promote tourism

businesses and experiences. This means that the lawful basis we use to process your personal data is our ‘Legislative Mandate’.

Should your Application be successful we will retain it for 10 years from the payment of the last instalment of the grant.

If you have any data protection related queries, please contact dataprotection@failteireland.ie

Children First Act

Applicants should note that anyone applying for funding from Fáilte Ireland must be compliant with the requirements of the Children First Act, 2015.

The following terms and conditions apply specifically to Grantees

Standard indicative Terms and Conditions attaching to the Investment Grant Agreement

A successful Applicant will be required to enter into an Investment Grant Agreement with Fáilte Ireland. The standard terms and conditions of such an agreement are outlined below and will cover various elements including, but not limited to, the following requirements:

- Grant Purpose
- State Aid Compliance
- Public Procurement
- Retention of Records
- Performance Monitoring
- Freedom of Information, Data Protection and other statutory obligations
- Breach of Agreement
- Security
- Publicity and Marketing
- Visitor use
- Repayment / Disposal
- Drawdown of Development Investment Grant

Fáilte Ireland is not bound to propose an Investment Grant Agreement that reflects, in all respects, these Guidelines.

Applicants should note the following in particular:

Security

Where funding in excess of the de Minimis Threshold of €300,000 is offered to projects in private ownership, the Applicant will be required to provide adequate security to the satisfaction of Fáilte Ireland to secure the investment grant for the first ten years of the operative period.

This security will be in the form of a fixed charge over an unencumbered asset(s) to the value of the investment grant and the Applicant must outline the security they propose to offer. This will be requested as part of the Application process. In the event that a fixed charge is not adequate security by itself, the Applicant must provide additional security in a form satisfactory to Fáilte Ireland.

In the case of trusts or voluntary organisations, a deed of covenant may be set up between Fáilte Ireland and the Applicant.

When Fáilte Ireland has confirmed that the security proposed by the Applicant is satisfactory, the Applicant will be required to execute the necessary documentation to put the security in place before any funding is payable.

State Aid Compliance

The Grantee will comply with EU State Aid rules and agree to repay any grant monies required to be repaid to Fáilte Ireland or otherwise where the business or the project is no longer State Aid compliant.

Completion of Work

The date by which work must be completed, the particular conditions in relation to meeting industry standards and statutory and local authority requirements, will be specified in the Investment Grant Agreement.

Public Procurement

The Grantee shall comply with EU and National public procurement law and associated procedures, the core principles of which are that procurement policy and practice should be accountable, competitive, fair and transparent, non-discriminatory, provide for equality of treatment and be conducted with probity and integrity. In particular, the Grantee must comply with the “Public Procurement Guidelines - Competitive Process”, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c23f5-public-procurement-guidelines-for-goods-and-services/> and all other applicable regulations, statutory instruments and EU Directives.

Public Spending Code

All public bodies, including Fáilte Ireland, who are distributing Public Funding, are obliged to comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code to ensure best value is achieved from state resources. Fáilte Ireland and Grantees under this Scheme are also subject to the rules of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circular 13/2014 - Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds. Grantees will be required to comply with the highest standard of transparency and accountability as set out therein. For more information on Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds see www.circulars.gov.ie.

Repayment / Disposal

Where the Grantee fails to comply with any of the conditions of the Investment Grant Agreement or information supplied is found to be incorrect Fáilte Ireland may, at its sole discretion require specific performance of the conditions of the Scheme and/or require immediate repayment of the Grant, or any part of the Grant already paid, to Fáilte Ireland from the Grantee and/or be under no obligation to pay the Grant or any part thereof to the Grantee.

Visitor Use

During the Operative Period the Project must be open to the public on a minimum days per year immediately after the opening of the grant-aided project as outlined in the Investment Grant Agreement. The investment grant is repayable if the project ceases to be operated as agreed during the Operative Period.

Measurement of Visitor Numbers

If the Grantee is not already measuring visitor numbers, they must incorporate a new method, compliant with all applicable data protection legislation, for recording visitor numbers and include a methodology for recording whether those visitors are resident in the local area, elsewhere in Ireland or, for overseas, their country of origin.

Monitoring & Updates

The Grantee must provide monthly updates and year end reports on the progress of the project during the development and delivery stages of the project. The Grantee will file annual financial statements with Fáilte Ireland and also, if requested, more frequent management accounts, visitor and facility usage details etc. The Grantee must also co-operate with monitoring checks and reviews during the Operative Period. The Grantee must comply with on-going requirements of Fáilte Ireland or the European Commission during the development of the project and during the Operative Period.

To facilitate the efficient monitoring of compliance with the Scheme the Grantee will provide access to any staff member or representative of Fáilte Ireland or the European Commission.

Fáilte Ireland may carry out an impact analysis

of the Scheme to include a review of the impact of the funding. If selected to participate, the Grantee must comply with, and facilitate, all research that is undertaken as part of any such review.

Additionally, Grantees and Applicants will be required to provide any documentation as may prove necessary for Fáilte Ireland to discharge its evaluation and auditing responsibilities pursuant to the EU and domestic rules governing the administration of the EU Just Transition Fund.

Retention of Records

Grantees must comply with all conditions in relation to the retention of records, as per the Investment Grant Agreement which extends also to Contractors and Sub-Contractors engaged in the development. All relevant records must be made available upon request for examination by authorised officials of Fáilte Ireland, the Department of Tourism, other relevant Government Departments and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Tourism Sales and Marketing

It is essential that enterprises and infrastructure supported through this Investment Grant Scheme be supported by sales and/ or marketing activity as appropriate during the operative period. Depending on the location of the funded activity, The Ireland's Hidden Heartlands or Ireland's Ancient East logo, message and branding must be included on all marketing collateral including any promotional media and literature, any websites that the Grantee operates and on any external signage. Brand guidelines will be issued to approved projects prior to completion.

Horizontal Principles

In the Investment Grant Agreement all Grantees will be asked to confirm that they will comply with the following requirements on Horizontal Principles:

- All beneficiaries will confirm that they have taken steps to prevent any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, marital status & family status & membership of the traveller community during the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of programmes and in particular, accessibility for persons with disabilities. Where a public body is being funded they will undertake 'Public Duty' training (online).
- All beneficiaries will confirm the promotion of sustainable development including the 6 principles of "Do No Significant Harm (DNSH)" - climate change mitigation, climate change adaption, the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources, the circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling, pollution prevention and control to air, water, and land and the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystem. The DNSH Assessment⁷ carried out by RSK on behalf of the Managing Authority at the design stage of the Programme found that Actions under priority JTF2 Do No Significant Harm under

any of the 6 principles of DNSH within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

- In addition, and in accordance with the principles of regenerative tourism, all beneficiaries will be required to consider, plan for and report on any net positive contribution their activities can have in supporting the 6 principles of DNSH and in supporting the regeneration of local communities.

Acknowledging receipt of support from the Just Transition Fund

Recipients of funding will be required, in accordance with EU rules, to acknowledge the receipt of support from the EU Just Transition Fund. Funding recipients are required to comply with the communications and visibility guidelines set out in the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) . Non-compliance can result in a loss of up to 3% of EU JTF financial support.

This involves including displaying appropriate logos and funding statement [as shown below] a description on their official website, social media sites, a statement on public communication material, display of posters, and display of billboards in certain instances. Details of this requirement shall be set out in the Investment Grant Agreement/ Letter of Offer.



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7. RSK Report for Do No Significant Harm Assessment of the EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-2027 (October 2022)



www.failteireland.ie/JustTransition



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