Invest Northern Ireland is launching a new grant scheme to support innovation in NI businesses called the BUSINESS INNOVATION GRANT (BIG). This programme aligns to the 10X vision with its focus on innovation and inclusivity.

BIG proposes to deliver grant support to Sole Traders, Micro and SMEs in the wider business base in NI (non Invest NI clients) enabling them to complete the essential innovation activities needed to either start their innovation journey or to successfully progress their existing one. The innovation support delivered through BIG will also enable businesses to progress along the four stages of the Innovate NI Innovation Framework.

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Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

Template

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

Business Innovation Grant (BIG)

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Developing a Policy Strategy Plan

Adopting a Policy Strategy Plan

Implementing a Policy Strategy Plan

Revising a Policy Strategy Plan Designing a Public Service

Delivering a Public Service

X

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Business Innovation Grant (BIG)

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Invest Northern Ireland

1A. Name of Public Authority.

**SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016**

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N/A

*Reasons why a definition of ‘rural’ is not applicable.*

N/A

*Rationale for using alternative definition of ‘rural’.*

N/A

*Details of alternative definition of ‘rural’ used.*

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition). Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of ‘rural’ is not applicable.

X

1F. What definition of ‘rural’ is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

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2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas *differently* from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

X

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

**SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service**

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The proposed BIG intervention is to be provided across Northern Ireland and is not Belfast centric, therefore this positive economic measure is unlikely to impact people in rural areas in any negative way or be more difficult to access.

Applications for the proposed interventions will be accessed online via Invest NI website. This is not expected to negatively impact rural businesses/dwellers as we deliver ongoing services in this manner, which are being accessed by rural businesses/dwellers currently without issue.

If rural businesses/dwellers experience any issues accessing online Invest NI resources, they can call our Business Support Team or the Programme Management Team who can provide suitable alternatives, such as hard copy application forms.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

Rural Businesses Rural Tourism Rural Housing

Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas Education or Training in Rural Areas

Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas

Poverty in Rural Areas Deprivation in Rural Areas

Rural Crime or Community Safety Rural Development

Agri-Environment

Other (Please state)

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

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3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders Published Statistics Consultation with Other Organisations Research Papers Surveys or Questionnaires Other Publications

Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

X

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

**SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas**

BIG is designed to support NI businesses start or progress their innovation activities. The scheme will provide grant support to c. 150-200 businesses in the first call and is designed to attract a spread of applications from throughout all areas of Northern Ireland.

BIG is unlikely to negatively impact businesses, organisations and people in rural areas. No actions were taken to identify additional social and economic needs beyond those established in RNIA guidance. However, we considered the following:

* Is appropriate infrastructure in place to enable businesses/ dwellers in rural areas to access the service**? Yes, currently many rural based people and businesses successfully access INI support already.**
* Will people in more remote rural areas be able to access the service? **Yes**
* Could it cost people in rural areas disproportionately more to access the service**? No**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who rely on public transport services? **No**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who don’t have access to high quality broadband? **No as we will offer alternative means of application if required.**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas whose access to mobile communications is variable or limited in areas**? No as we will offer alternative means of application if required.**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people operating businesses in rural areas**? No**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who have to travel longer distances to avail of employment opportunities**? No**
* Could there be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who require access to childcare facilities? **No**
* Will the policy, strategy, plan or public service affect certain groups of people in rural areas disproportionally e.g. seasonal workers, farmers and farm families or older people, younger people or people with disabilities who do not have access to transport? **No**
* Are there pockets of hidden poverty or deprivation within rural areas which need to be taken account of in determining the effects of the policy, strategy, plan or public service on people in rural areas? **No**.

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3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

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The proposed BIG programme will be available to businesses across NI regardless of geographical location. See 3E

Financial support for eligible costs:-

* No difference in support offered, same value to both urban/rural
* External consultant costs are likely more influenced by sector/experience in delivering similar projects than by location.

This scheme will allow businesses in rural/urban areas time to identify innovative activities as well as new revenue sources. All applications will be scored against a standard scoring matrix.

This scheme will allow businesses to get first-hand experience in developing innovative projects/activities/processes with an expert consultant from which knowledge will transfer to the business enabling benefits from cost savings to increased efficiency and ultimately greater profits.

This grant will be accessible to all businesses in urban and rural areas. The grant will be promoted through our partnerships and key stakeholder engagement across NI including the 11 Councils.

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

**SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas**

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If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

Yes No If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.

X

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

**SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service**

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Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:

KAREN FINLAY

PAUL O’CALLAGHAN

Position/Grade:

G7

Division/Branch

REGIONAL BUSINESS/EU & PARTNER DELIVERY

INNOVATION, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT/INNOVATION ACCREDITATION

Signature:

Date:

Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:

Pamela Marron

Position/Grade:

Equality Manager

Division/Branch:

Performance Compliance and Coordination

Signature:

Pamela Marron

Date:

19/01/24

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

X

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

**SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording**

While the BIG programme will have some benefits to rural businesses and people, it was not created for the sole benefit of rural dwellers.

Invest Northern Ireland is launching the BIG programme to support NI businesses to start/develop/improve innovation activities in line with 10X targets to increase the coverage of the Innovate NI recognition to 10% of the total NI business population and to increase the percentage of innovative businesses from 35% to 55% by 2030.

The business need was identified by the fact that by industry, innovation active businesses as a percentage of all businesses in NI during 2018 to 2020 was lower than the UK as an average of all sectors. Increasing the number of innovative firms is seen as key for supporting wider economic growth in NI, where the majority of businesses are SMEs. The UK Innovation Survey (2021) indicated that between 2018 and 2020, 38% of NI firms were actively engaged in innovation, the lowest rate amongst the UK’s twelve regions and 7% below the UK average (45%).

BIG supports eligible external consultancy and sub-contracting costs to help businesses develop/improve their innovation activities. It is designed to attract a spread of applications from throughout all areas of Northern Ireland and have a positive economic impact within both urban and rural areas.

 employment levels and generate new sales from customers outside Northern Ireland. The scheme will provide grant support to eligible companies to help them create new full time permanent positions within the business as well as assisting them with the costs of targeting customers outside Northern Ireland, technical development activities, as well as upskilling existing and new employees.

It is designed to attract a spread of applications from throughout all areas of Northern Ireland and we believe it will provide positive economic impact within rural areas.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.