



SMART Programme

Helping small businesses become more competitive by developing new products and processes

January 2007

Introduction

The objective of our SMART award programme (Small Firms Merit Award for Research and Technology) is to help small businesses improve their competitiveness by developing new products and processes, and to stimulate the creation of new, innovative businesses.

SMART Micro projects aim to develop a simple low-cost prototype of a new product or process which can involve technology innovation or novelty, or both.

SMART Stage One projects aim to investigate the technical and commercial feasibility of innovative technology.

SMART Stage Two projects are normally only open to successful Stage One projects. These projects aim to develop a pre-production prototype of a new product or process which involves a significant technology advance.

By this we mean new or substantially improved devices, products, processes or services which are likely to form the basis of a major step forward in terms of productivity, sustainable development, competitiveness or practice for an industry.

How will it help me?

The SMART programme will help your business to review the use of technology, access new technology and research and develop innovative technologies.

SMART shares the risks relating to R&D with you and encourages your business to invest and exploit new developments and technological innovations, and lever private sector funding which can result in sustainable business development partnerships.

How does it work?

There are three types of assistance aimed at supporting different types of R&D projects:

SMART Micro Projects

SMART Micro projects are competitive and assist individuals or micro firms (up to 10 employees) to develop a single low-cost prototype of an innovative product or process with the project lasting 6–12 months. An award is made available at 50 per cent of eligible project costs. The maximum award is £10,000 and is normally paid quarterly against claims submitted.

SMART Stage One Projects

SMART Stage One projects are competitive and assist individuals and small businesses (up to 50 employees) to carry out a technical and commercial feasibility study lasting 6-18 months. An award is made available at 75 per cent of the eligible project costs. The maximum award is £45,000. If the winning applicant can demonstrate that it is necessary for the project to succeed, one third may be paid up front, with the remainder paid quarterly against claims submitted.

SMART Stage Two Projects

If you win a SMART Stage One award and successfully complete the project you may apply for a SMART Stage Two award for further support to assist with the development of a pre-production prototype.

SMART Stage Two awards are non-competitive and assistance is available at up to 40 per cent of the eligible project costs, up to a maximum of £150,000. Assistance is paid retrospectively after expenditure is incurred and paid-out.



There must be a gap of at least three months between claims and projects must take at least six months, but no more than 36 months to complete.

SMART Stage Two offers a streamlined application process to SMART stage one winners continuing their product and process development, provided that the application is made within six months of completion of the SMART Stage One project.

Assistance under SMART Stage Two is not automatic and is dependent on a negotiated process of approval.

Who is eligible?

You are eligible to compete for a SMART award if you are:

- an individual intending to start a business;
- a sole-trader, partnership or independent company; and
- part of a group planning to operate from Northern Ireland which meets the European Community definition of a 'small or micro enterprise' contained in the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC of 6 May 2003

To obtain a SMART award, you must demonstrate that:

- the proposed project will represent a significant technological advance for the UK industry or sector concerned;
- significant technical risks are associated with the technology challenge;
- you own, or have the rights to exploit, the intellectual property needed to undertake the project (note that all intellectual property arising from projects supported under SMART must be owned by the business receiving the award);
- the commercial prospects for the end product or process are good;

- realistic and effective routes have been identified for realising the commercial potential for the product or process;
- the necessary management and technical expertise and resource to ensure that the project is brought to a successful conclusion are either available in-house or will be brought in-house;
- financial assistance under SMART in Northern Ireland is essential;
- both the project and the business applying for the award are financially viable.

Becoming an Invest NI client

To qualify as an Invest NI client company, your business must meet certain criteria.

You should typically be from the manufacturing or international tradeable sectors and be able to demonstrate that currently, or over the next three years, your business will have:

- total sales of over £100,000 a year;
- sales outside Northern Ireland of greater than 25 per cent of turnover **or** greater than £250,000 a year; and
- the capability and willingness to work with Invest NI.

If you are not an Invest NI client, but can satisfy the above criteria and would like to become one, please contact the Invest NI office in your area.

Full details can be found at www.investni.com.

Contact

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nibusinessinfo.co.uk

Invest NI has launched a new online information and support facility, **nibusinessinfo.co.uk**

This web site provides all Northern Ireland businesses and entrepreneurs with free access to an extensive source of essential business information.

nibusinessinfo.co.uk provides 24x7 advice, information, guidance and signposting, with over 5,000 fact sheets and over 70 interactive tools on offer. Every aspect of setting up and running a business is covered, from the earliest days of developing a business idea to the legal issues involved in selling a business concern.

nibusinessinfo.co.uk also features case studies showing how local businesses have handled particular business challenges.

nibusinessinfo.co.uk provides you with a single point of access for all your business information needs, freeing up time for to concentrate on running operations.