

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Agri-food Demonstrator Pilot Grant Scheme

APPLICATION GUIDANCE NOTES

The Agri-food Demonstrator Pilot Grant Scheme is funded by the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council as part of the Agri-food Sector Action Plan and administered by the Economic Development Department.

This scheme is a Mid and East Antrim Borough Council initiative.



Contents

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. Background to Grant Programme
- 1.2 Levels of Grant Award
- 1.3 Who can apply?
- 1.4 Who cannot apply?
- 1.5 What can be funded?
- 1.6 What cannot be funded?
- 1.7 What should I submit with my application?

2.0 How to answer the questions

3.0 How we assess and score your application

- 3.1 Eligibility Assessment
- 3.2 What if an application is not eligible?
- 3.3 Assessment and Scoring
- 3.4 How decisions are made
- 3.5 What happens if an application is successful?
- 3.6 What happens if an application is unsuccessful?
- 3.7 Grant Application Assessment Schedule

Appendix 1

Local Council contact details and method of submitting application

Appendix 2

- 1 Publication of Data
- 2 Data Protection Act
- 3 Freedom of Information Act
- 4 Equality
- 5 GDPR

Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to Grant Programme

The Agri-food Demonstrator Pilot Grant scheme, part of the Agri-food Action Plan, aims to sustain and support agri-food businesses in the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area by supporting innovative agri-food projects which demonstrate a new product, process, technique or service. The scheme is funded by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and administered and managed directly by the Council.

1.2 Level of Grant Aid

The scheme can provide funding of up to 50% of eligible costs up to a maximum of £1,500. The minimum grant awarded will be £250. The total cost of the project must be a minimum of £500, the maximum project cost is £10,000. Applicants must provide a minimum of 50% match funding required towards the project. Only one application per applicant will be considered.

This is a competitive process and all grants awarded will be determined on the base of merit.

1.3 Who Can Apply?

Grants are available to support companies/entities in the agri-food, food and drink production, food and drink manufacturing and agri-technology/engineering sectors in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. The support is for small scale demonstrator projects in the areas above. Therefore the scheme is open to Northern Ireland based SMEs and social enterprises. This includes sole traders, partnerships, limited companies, new start-ups and pre-trading entities including individuals/potential entrepreneurs with a project that could be commercialised.

Organisations with more than 250 FTE employees are ineligible.

Applicant eligibility will apply to either Business Size (i.e. no of employees) or Business Turnover (for the most recent available full accounting period of 1 year), whichever is highest as follows:

Grant Award Level	Contribution	Maximum Business Size		Maximum Business Turnover
Min £250 up to max of £1,500	Up to 50% of eligible costs	1 - 250 employees	OR	Annual turnover not exceeding £50million

You can apply for an Agri-food Demonstrator Grant if:

- The business is based in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council or has a physical presence (i.e. Postal address) in the Borough.
- You are a small enterprise with fewer than 50 employees and either an annual turnover and/or an annual balance sheet not exceeding €10m.
- You are a medium-sized enterprise with fewer than 250 employees and either an annual turnover not exceeding €50m or an annual balance sheet not exceeding €43m.
- You are an established business that is actively trading, evidenced by providing your self-assessment number or Limited Company details, sales turnover details and a copy of a recent bank statement that is used by the business.
- Eligible applicants also include: Sole traders, partnerships, limited companies, new start-ups and pre-trading entities including individuals/potential entrepreneurs with a project that could be commercialised.
- Your business currently employs less than 250 full-time equivalent employees.

- You are appropriately insured or prepared to obtain appropriate insurance if awarded a grant. No evidence of this is required at application stage, but you will be asked to confirm insurance cover at grant claim stage.
- You can provide the minimum number of quotations for each item to be purchased which meet the guidance stated in section 1.7.
- It is anticipated that grant offers will be made within 12 weeks of receipt of your application and pre-eligibility checks being completed, and your project cannot commence until you receive a formal offer of funding. You can complete your project within a short timeframe but all projects must be completed within one year of the date the letter of offer is issued or by **31 December 2022** (whichever occurs first) with all project expenditure incurred, paid and processed through the bank account by this date.
- The applicant is aged 18 or above by the time a Letter of Offer is issued.
- Only one application can be accepted per business and if not a registered business, then a maximum of one application per applicant will be accepted.
- Successful applicants will be required to attend a letter of workshop prior before they can accept and return a letter of offer and begin the project delivery.

1.4 Who Cannot Apply?

The grant scheme cannot support:

- Businesses based outside of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (i.e. with no physical presence in the Borough);
- Retail businesses or businesses not trading within one of the sectors/areas outlined in 1.3.

1.5 What can be funded?

This is an Agri-food Demonstrator fund which will provide financial support for the deployment of a process, technology or scientific approach to demonstrate something of value to potential customers. The programme will support the creation of “small-scale demonstrator projects” to highlight techniques, products and services that will support higher margin profits.

“Small scale demonstrator projects” refers to a project, activity or exercise which demonstrates capability or improvement in a technique, product or service. For example, typical demonstration project might include testing or piloting of a new product processing capability for a prospective customer or consumer.

The scheme will also support completion of scoping/research exercises relating to viability, testing and demonstration of an innovative technique, product or service.

Expenditure must be directly related to activities or items required to demonstrate the project value to potential customers and must support testing of innovative techniques or products which focus on higher margin profits.

The agri-demonstrator project is about doing things differently or doing different things to make your business better. The scheme should help you in one of two ways:

1. To scope out or explore the viability of an innovative technique, service or product for or within the agri-food sector;
2. Demonstrate the value or capability of improvement to a technique. Service or product for or within the agri-food sector.

NB. We are particularly interested in supporting projects which focus on development of higher margin products.

Typical project expenditure includes:

- Assistance to scope out, explore or develop new or improved techniques, services or products;
- Assistance to demonstrate, in a practical manner, the value, capability or opportunity of a new technique, service or product;
- Access to information and expertise to help scope out, develop or demonstrate a new technique, service or product;
- Support to access bespoke agri-food technology centres or facilities which help facilitate demonstration of a new technique, service or product.

Projects might include those which demonstrate deployment or utilisation in the following areas of:

- Artificial intelligence;
- Precision agriculture;
- Image recognition;
- Internet of things;
- Sensors;
- Nutrition technology;
- Robotics;
- Cloud computing;
- Sustainability;
- Optimizing processes & practices;
- Waste prevention;
- Carbon zero footprint;
- Ammonia reduction;
- Reduced antibiotic use in animals;
- Employee safety farming and smart farming.

While collaboration with academia is encouraged, it is not a requirement for your project to be eligible. If you do wish to access academic expertise, please contact us and we will sign-post you to relevant providers where possible.

1.6 What cannot be funded?

The following items cannot be funded under the Scheme:

- Any resource items, such as marketing materials, websites, training, feasibility studies, or software;
- Standard mobile apps;
- General sales activities;
- Standard business advice;
- General marketing activities;
- Buying training for your business;
- Buying equipment for your existing business operations;
- Business plans and economic appraisals;
- Website development and online optimisation;
- Software purchases and basic software development;
- Internships for students from knowledge institutions;
- Aid that would promote or subsidise the cost of exports;
- Achieving compliance with statutory regulations or legislation;
- Testing products that are not within the ownership of your business;
- Project costs incurred prior to the issue date of the grant;
- Capital building works or refurbishments;

- Capital items or items of equipment with a value of more than £10,000 (in exceptional circumstances, a project with a value in excess of £10,000 may be considered);
- Business running costs, such as staff costs, rent, rates, electric;
- Motorised vehicles, including vans, lorries, cars, boats and bikes;
- General maintenance or refurbishment works;
- Any activity or action that is a statutory requirement of your business (eg for Health and Safety purposes such as Personal Protective Equipment) or the responsibility of another government department;
- Second hand equipment;
- Consumable items used by businesses that are replaced regularly because they wear out or are used up.

Please note this list is not exhaustive, Council Officers can speak to you about your project.

1.7 What should I submit with my application?

Your application form must be fully completed and submitted to the Council office as described in Appendix 1 with all required supporting documents.

1. A copy of most recent Bank / Building Society Statement for the account used for the business. Note, this should be the same account that project items are purchased or paid from.
2. A minimum of 2 quotes for **each item** you are applying for as per the following guidance:

Total Estimated Cost per Item	Action & Minimum Number
£0 - £2,999.99	At least 2 written or email quotations from <u>different</u> suppliers (internet quotes cannot be used)
£3,000 - £7,999.99	At least 3 written or email quotations from <u>different</u> suppliers (internet quotes cannot be used)
£8,000 - £10,000	At least 4 written or email quotations from <u>different</u> suppliers (internet quotes cannot be used)

Procurement Guidance

- A detailed specification should be prepared for each item to include delivery, installation costs if applicable. This is a detailed description of the design and/or materials used to make something or the minimum standard of workmanship and materials required to meet your needs. All suppliers invited to quote should be issued with the specification and email evidence of this may be required, for example copy of email sent to supplier.
- At least 2 quotes from 2 separate suppliers should be sought for each item. You or a business that you are an owner/partner/director of, are excluded from quoting for the supply of goods, services or works to a project that you may be offered funding for.
- Applicants will ensure that no conflict of interest shall arise in the appointment of any person to provide any goods, works or services which may be wholly or partly funded by the Council, and shall upon request provide the Council with written confirmation that no such conflict arises. A written declaration of interest must be provided where any member of the applicants organisation has any association or connection with any person who bids to provide works, goods or services to the Project Promoter.
- Quotes should be 'like-for-like'; particularly where items are specific e.g. IT / machinery etc. Quotations for the same make and model of products must be provided.
- Ensure that all costs are quoted and accounted for, eg delivery and installation costs should

be part of the quote.

- Email quotes are acceptable and should include a covering email.
- Quotes must be dated prior to close of call and contain the supplier's name.
- The lowest quotation should be selected with corresponding costs detailed on the application form.
- Details of the quotes received must be listed in Annex A of the application form.
- Scanned copies of the quotations can be accepted with your application.

Your application and supporting documents must be submitted via the method listed in

Appendix 1. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.

Section 2: How to answer the questions

All sections of your application form must be completed as fully and concisely as possible as this information will be used in the assessment of your project proposal. Incomplete applications will be deemed ineligible and will not be assessed for funding. Please note maximum word limits per question.

Q1 Applicant Details

- (a) Please state name of business
- (b) Please state contact name and details
- (c) Please provide the status of your business and confirmation that you are running a registered business by selecting 1 of the options and completing the details in full

Q2 Business Overview

- (a) Please state the date your business commenced trading
- (b) Please state your business address, if different to contact address. Please remember that the project must be based in the Council area to be eligible for grant aid.
- (c) Please provide a comprehensive overview of your current business activities. *Maximum 500 words*
- (d) Please enter the current number of full-time and part-time employees (including yourself if applicable). Full-time employees must work at least 30hours per week in the business.

Note - in order to be eligible, the business or enterprise must employ less than 250 full-time equivalent employees.

- (e) Please provide your sales turnover for the last complete financial year, or year to date;
- (f) Please enter current business net worth.

Q3 Project Details

- (a) **Project Overview:** Please explain clearly what your project will entail, this should include, but is not limited to: Outlining the key aims, objectives, target market and all activities you plan to use the financial support for. *Maximum 500 words*
- (b) **Project Need:** Please explain and provide evidence to demonstrate the need and demand for your project. You should clearly demonstrate how you know there is a need for the project (E.g. Are there deficiencies in your current business, or a market for the proposal and what is your evidence of this?) If you have identified demand, how do you know this and what level of demand exists? *Maximum 500 words.*
- (c) **Innovation:** Please demonstrate the level of innovation in your project. What is innovative about your proposed project? Explain how the innovation will impact on your own business, customers and/or proposed target market. *Maximum 500 words.*
- (d) **Economic Impact:** Please tick and provide information on each specific economic impact your project will have on your business, or your target market, over the next 12 months. You should complete this information of all boxes that apply to your business/project:
 - Existing jobs will be sustained
 - New jobs will be created
 - Sales turnover will increase
 - Business will be more efficient

- Increased innovation in the market place
- Increased innovation in my business
- Export sales outside of NI will commence/ increase

(e) **Sustainability:** Demonstrate how the project or expenditure contributes to business sustainability? *Maximum 500 words.*

Q4 Project Costs

- (a) Tick as appropriate, enter VAT registration number if required.
- (b) Please provide details of the items/activities/expenditure you require funding for.

Note - There maximum total project cost is £10,000 and the maximum grant request is £1,500. In exceptional circumstances, a project with a total value in excess of £10,000 may be considered.

If your business or enterprise is not VAT registered, you may apply for up to 50% of the GROSS cost (i.e. the cost including VAT). If your business or enterprise is VAT registered, you can only apply for up to 50% of the NET cost (cost excluding VAT).

Note - you will be required to show that procurement of all items has been completed and that this procurement meets the procurement guidance.

Q5 Project Timescales

Please confirm if you can complete your project or verify expenditure by within one year of the date of the date on which your letter of offer is issued or by **31 December 2022** (whichever occurs first), to include project items purchased and received, and paid and cleared your bank account by this date.

Note - projects which have already commenced are ineligible for funding. Your project cannot commence until a Letter of Offer is released (anticipated to be within 12 weeks of receipt of your application in full, including completion of pre-eligibility checks).

- Q6** Please indicate if you would like to be registered onto the Councils Economic Development Database to receive future communications that may be relevant for your business. If successful, you may be asked to take part in PR activities as part of the process.

Checklist

Please tick to confirm what you are submitting with your application.

Declarations

- (a) Please read the declaration carefully and complete it in full.
- (b) Please read the DE-Minimis Aid declaration carefully. Complete details of all de-minimis aid received in the last 3 fiscal years. Please note that this may include grant funding (for example through the Council, InterTrade Ireland or Invest NI) and also business support programmes (such as local Council mentoring programmes). Complete the declaration in full.

Annex A - Evidence of Value

Please complete in full for all quotations received and remember to include copies of all documents with your application submission. Scanned copies of quotations will be accepted.

Section 3 - How we assess and score your application

3.0 Overview

Every application received will be assessed to ensure the following:

- To ensure that the business is eligible to apply to this particular Scheme.
- To ensure each applicant's capability to deliver the proposal, and
- To determine how well the proposal meets the business's needs and supports the business sustainability and growth.

An acknowledgement receipt will be issued to you once your submission has been received. The Council will assess your application for eligibility. If your application is eligible to apply for grant aid, it will be forwarded for full assessment and scored against the stated criteria.

3.1 Eligibility Assessment

If the business, based on the information supplied, is able to satisfy the Council of their eligibility, they will progress to the next part of the process.

If the business, based on the information supplied, is not able to satisfy the Council of their eligibility, they will be advised of specific omissions/shortcomings and how these can be addressed for any future funding requests.

3.2 What if an application is not eligible?

If your application is not eligible, you will be notified immediately and the reasons will be outlined to you. Your application will not proceed to assessment and scoring.

If a business is not eligible for funding through the Programme, businesses may wish to contact the Council, who will help signpost to other sources of support.

3.3 Assessment and Scoring

If the business, based on the information supplied, is able to satisfy the eligibility criteria, they will be scored according to established assessment criteria shown in the table below:

AREA	Score
Project Details	/ 10
Project Need	/ 30
Level of Innovation	/ 20
Economic Impact	/ 20
Sustainability	/ 20
TOTAL	/ 100

Applications must score at least 65% in order to avail of funding.

Applicants will be ranked according to score obtained and available funding allocated to the highest ranking applications. Applicants who fail to achieve a score of at least 65% will be advised that they have been unsuccessful. Applicants who score above 65%, but who do not score high enough to be awarded funding due to lack of available funding will be notified of this.

3.4 How decisions are made

When the scores are finalised, the applications will be presented to the Council for approval.

Successful/unsuccessful applicants will be notified at this stage.

3.5 What happens if an application is successful?

If an application is successful, Council will issue a Letter of Offer which is a legal agreement with the business to deliver on the proposals outlined in their application form.

Signed Letters of Offer must be returned within **28 days of receipt**.

If successful, businesses **must** attend a Letter of Offer workshop which will explain the processes and procedures that relate to Programme monitoring, submitting a financial claim, requesting changes, promoting Council's support, monitoring and evaluation requirements and the process of verification.

The Agri-Demonstrator Pilot Grant Scheme is retrospective and therefore costs will only be reimbursed once items, activities or expenditure are purchased, paid in full, viewed in place and a grant claim submitted and processed. Applicants will have to provide original invoices and show evidence of payment of invoices through their bank account as part of the claim process. Items should be paid through the bank account for which a statement is provided as part of the application process. Credit card payments cannot be accepted.

Projects must be complete, paid in full and cleared the bank account within one year of the date on which your letter of offer is issued or by 31 December 2022 (whichever occurs first) or the project will be deemed ineligible and no grant payment will be made.

Businesses are required to provide information on the impact of their project on completion of the project. Officers from the Council may arrange post project visits in order to verify spend and discuss the monitoring information with the businesses that were funded.

3.6 What happens if an application is unsuccessful?

If an application is not successful, officers from the Council will be available to discuss with the business their application, and provide practical developmental support to address areas of concern.

An Appeals Process/Review Procedure is also available if an application is unsuccessful. The purpose of this is to ensure that the decisions taken and procedures followed for individual applications are applied fairly and consistently.

The Appeals Process/Review will provide an independent process through which an applicant will have the opportunity to submit information to the Review Panel indicating that either:

- the outcome was unreasonable or;
- the proper procedures were not followed.

Appeals on any other grounds will not be considered.

3.7 Grant Application Assessment Schedule

This is a rolling pilot grant scheme and applications will be accepted from the date on which the scheme is launched. Successful applications which pass the pre-eligibility checks will be assessed on a monthly basis and successful applicants will receive a letter of offer within 12 weeks of checks being completed. This process will be repeated until the project budget has been fully administered.

Incomplete applications will not be accepted under any circumstances. The application form must be fully completed and all required supporting documentation must be supplied at time of submission or the application will not be considered.

Applications and supporting documentation should be submitted to the Council following the method stated in Appendix 1.

The Programme will follow this eight step administrative process:

Step 1	Open call for applications is made
Step 2	Applications are submitted to the Council
Step 3	Applications are assessed
Step 4	Letters of Offer are issued and applicant attends Letter of Offer workshop
Step 5	Letters of Offer are returned within 28 days
Step 6	Projects are completed and paid in full by applicant
Step 7	Grant claim is submitted to local Council for processing
Step 8	Grant payment is made directly to applicant

	<u>Appendix 1 - Council Contact Details</u>	
Business Area	Contact Details	Method of Submitting Application
Mid and East Antrim Economic Development Department	Connor O'Dornan Strategic Projects Officer Tel: 07753 859 720 Email: invest@midandeastantrim.gov.uk Website: www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/agri-food	Via online Grant Portal: https://mea.eformz.info/ Hard-copy postal applications will NOT be accepted.

Appendix 2 - Additional Information for Applicants

1. Publication of Data

If your application is successful and your project is awarded funding, please note that the Council may publicise details of all financial support awarded/paid out to beneficiaries. This will include the name of the beneficiary, their postal town, their post code and the total amount of financial support received by the beneficiary from Mid and East Antrim Borough Council.

2. Data Protection Act

- We will use the information you give us on the application form during assessment and for the life of any grant we award you to administer and analyse grants and for our own research.
- All information submitted in your application form, supporting documentation and any future claim will be made available to the funding organisation, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council.
- We may give copies of this information to individuals and organisations we consult when assessing applications, when monitoring grants and evaluating the way our funding programmes work and the effect they have. These organisations may include accountants, external evaluators, external auditors and other organisations or groups involved in delivering the project.
- We may also share information with other government departments, including Invest Northern Ireland, organisations providing match funding and other organisations and individuals with a legitimate interest in applications and grants, or for the prevention or detection of fraud.
- We might use the data you provide for our own research. We recognise the need to maintain the confidentiality of vulnerable groups and their details will not be made public in any way, except as required by law.

For further details on your privacy see the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council website - www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/privacy-notice

3 Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives members of the public the right to request any information that we hold, subject to certain exemption that may apply. This includes information received from third parties, such as, although not limited to, grant applicants, grant holders and contractors. If information is requested under the Freedom of Information Act we will release it, subject to exemptions; although we may consult with you first. If you think that information you are providing may be exempt from release if requested, you should let us know when you apply. For further information please visit the Information Commissioner's Office at www.ico.gov.uk

4 Equality Considerations

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) and Equality Monitoring

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) Mid and East Antrim Borough Council has a statutory obligation to promote equality of opportunity between: persons of different religious

belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependants and persons without.

The Act also requires the Council to take into account the promotion of good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

To meet its statutory obligations, Council has to continuously monitor and assess the equality uptake and outcomes of its policies and programmes, to determine if there are any adverse effects or consequences. And if there are, to look at ways to lessen these.

This equality monitoring is done through the completion of an equality monitoring form (questionnaire) by project beneficiaries once the funding has been awarded. Council is legally required to conduct this monitoring, but it is voluntary for beneficiaries to complete the form, which will be anonymous and confidential. The completed forms are returned directly to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in a freepost envelope which will be provided. This information will be stored confidentially by NISRA. These completed forms are not seen by Council.

The information collected will only be used for Equality Monitoring purposes and in compliance with The Data Protection Act. The details on this form will not be used in the decision to award funding to any person/group who applies to the Scheme, nor will this form be linked in any way to details of individual participants.

All beneficiaries are encouraged to complete the form as it will greatly help the Council comply with its statutory duty and in its assessment of the equality uptake and outcomes of the Scheme across different groups of people.

5 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

When you apply for the Agri-Demonstrator Pilot Grant Scheme we will ask for some personal information because, for example, your personal email address or telephone number is used on the applicant organisation's behalf. When you provide this information it is processed in adherence with the GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018 as well as the scheme's Terms and Conditions to enable us to communicate with you about the application.

We take care to ensure that any personal information supplied is dealt with in a way which complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation. This means that any personal information you supply will be processed principally for the purpose for which it has been provided. However, the Council may also use it for other legitimate purposes in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and Freedom of Information legislation. These include:

- Occupational health and welfare;
- Compilation of statistics;
- Disclosure to other organisations when required by law to do so;
- Disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 where such disclosure is in the public interest;
- The prevention and detection of fraud or maladministration (e.g. The Comptroller & Auditor General and HM Revenue & Customs).

For further details on your privacy see the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council website - www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/privacy-notice