

RURAL TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

2018-2020

Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

Tourism is one of Scotland's seven key economic sectors and is especially important to our rural areas. The increasing popularity of outstanding scenic areas stimulated by marketing successes such as the North Coast 500, film tourism and the huge growth in cruise liner arrivals has led to rapid increases in visitor numbers. This has resulted in some areas, at certain times of the year, experiencing pressure on infrastructure and negative impacts on some local communities.

Many of our more remote rural areas and free natural attractions are served by narrow or even single track roads, and often lack facilities such as parking, scenic laybys and public toilets. These roads are primarily designed for regular local traffic and not suited to increased usage during peak times. Visitors are often not sufficiently experienced to drive these routes, particularly in hired campervans.

On the 10th October 2017 the First Minister announced a £6 million rural tourism infrastructure fund to address some of these concerns.

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund will support collaborative projects that focus on improving the visitor experience in rural parts of Scotland that have faced pressure on their infrastructure or negative impacts on communities due to significant increases in visitor numbers

Funding

- Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund awards are available from £50,000 to a maximum of £300,000
- The Grant can provide Applicants with up to a **maximum** of 70% of approved project activity
- Applicants must provide a **minimum** of 30% match funding although this could include In Kind Support
- Only Local Authorities and the National Park Authorities can apply to the RTIF
- The fund will only be applicable to rural areas as defined by the Scottish Government's official Urban/Rural classification 5 & 6 – "accessible and remote rural areas" excluding settlements above 3000 people

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What type of activity CAN be supported by the RTIF?

Activity **eligible** for support through Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund award includes:-

- Car Parking including paths from car parks to scenic areas to ease access and address pressure points
- Scenic laybys,

- Camping facilities and disposal points (especially for camper vans),
- Toilet provision.
- Essential improvement works to paths to cope with visitor pressure or improve sustainable visitor management in the immediate area and potentially can be included in the project proposal.
- Directional road signage, waymarks and improved interpretation can also be included
- Interventions that encourage sustainable tourism, for example, recycling points
- Consideration will be given to sustainable, innovative, integrated projects which resolve both an immediate visitor pressure point but take account of wider area pressures and enhance access to natural attractions
- The fund will cover capital costs only
- Where appropriate, projects supported by the fund should create DDA compliant infrastructure
- NB. The fund will be guided by European State Aid legislation and would not apply to the commercial provision of facilities

2. What type of activity CAN NOT be supported under the RTIF?

Activity **ineligible** for support through Rural Tourism Infrastructure Grant Fund award includes:-

- It will not be used for funding new attractions, but rather mitigate existing pressures
- The RTIF will cannot be used to support community facilities such as village halls, playparks etc
- The fund will not support the development or creation of Broadband infrastructure
- The Fund will not support the production of marketing and promotional materials, such as leaflets, web sites or social media activity
- The Fund will not support ongoing revenue costs associated with the project including rental/lease costs or maintenance, admin or finance costs either during or post the project delivery
- The Fund cannot support staffing costs following completion of the project
- The fund cannot be used to fund new cycle routes or dual purpose pathways – the exception to this, as outlined previously, is where the creation of a new or enhanced path is linked to a wider environmental improvement
- Routine maintenance or repair of cycling and walking infrastructure cannot be funded
- Projects which have a negative impact on the natural heritage, including species and habitats, geology, landscapes and water courses will not be supported. Advice should be sought early on from appropriate bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and SEPA
- Applications that have been previously been refused planning permission
- Major road improvement works
- Feasibilities Studies

3. How will the £6m funding be split over the 2 years of the RTIF

Scottish Government have provisionally agreed a budget of £3m for 2018/19 and £3m for 2019/20 financial years. No split has been agreed between the application rounds and this will be entirely dependent on demand.

4. *Is there any limit to the number of applications that can be submitted by the same organisation?*

There is no limit on the number of applications that can be submitted over the 2 year lifetime of the RTIF by any organisation. However, the Fund will try to seek a geographical spread of funding throughout the Scottish rural areas and may introduce this as part of the criteria giving priority in the assessment process to areas which have not received any prior funding.

5. *Do I need Planning permission before I can apply to the RTIF?*

It is recognised that some projects may require either planning permission or an environmental assessment or both. To streamline the process, applicants should at least have approval in principle to be considered or have submitted a planning application by the time of the panel assessment in early March 2019. Applicant should have consulted widely with all relevant agencies including SNH, SEPA and the Planning Authority and notification of the planning position should be provided prior to the meeting of the Assessment Panel. However no grant award will be made until planning permission has been received and confirmation forwarded to the RTIF team.

6. *What kind of evidence do I need to supply to demonstrate visitor pressures at my project site?*

It is essential that you supply evidence of need for your project. Survey results from the community and or visitors which demonstrates a poor quality visitor and community experience would be ideal. Evidence of increased visitor numbers to a site using pedestrian or traffic counters would be helpful. Reports on, and any photographic evidence of, the deterioration of the environment as a result of visitor numbers could also be supplied. Comments on social media and Trip Advisor are also acceptable forms of evidence. Please ensure that your evidence is directly applicable to the site in question and is not of a generic nature covering a whole Local Authority area for example.

Letters of support from community groups or individuals are not regarded as evidence of a visitor pressure point but are useful to show evidence of community support and some evidence of community involvement, endorsement and support should also be provided.

7. *Are projects in Towns and villages in rural areas eligible for funding?*

The Scottish Government have defined the eligible areas according to the Scottish Government's official Urban/Rural classification Groups 5 & 6 – that is “accessible and remote rural areas” excluding settlements above 3000 people. The postcode of the project must be located within areas and this might well exclude projects in small towns within rural areas. If you are unsure of the classification of your project postcode then please get in touch with the RTIF team who will be able to clarify this for you.

8. Why can't Community Groups and other National Agencies and Charities apply for funding?

Scottish Government have established the criteria for the Fund and stipulated that only the Local Authorities and National Park Authorities can apply for funding. However Community Groups and other agencies can apply to their Local Authority or National Park if they have an eligible project. In addition, the applicant must demonstrate a collaborative approach with a strong buy-in and project support from local communities and tourism groups. This will form part of the assessment process. Private sector or individual businesses cannot apply to the RTIF either independently or through the Local Authority.

9. What funding sources can be used to match the RTIF Grant?

Applicants must provide 30% match funding for their project. This can come from public sector, community groups, European Programmes such as **Leader** or the private sector. Match Funding need not be all direct financial input and could take the form of in-kind support, such as land provided for the development which has been valued by an independent/external source.

Where land is provided in kind for a fixed period then public access must be guaranteed for no less than 20 years from the completion of the works.

Appropriate project development and management costs provided by the Applicant could also be considered as in-kind support and are eligible costs where these are based on **actual** salary costs paid and a record is kept of the number of days spent on the project.

General Local Authority, administration and finance costs are not eligible costs and cannot be claimed as match funding in kind or as expenditure. Only costs directly related to the delivery of the project are eligible.

Future revenue costs cannot be used at part of the 30% match funding as revenue costs are not eligible project costs.

10. Can I make a charge for the facilities?

You can make a small charge for facilities to cover for cleaning, maintenance and waste disposal but you cannot use the facilities supported by the RTIF as an income source to generate funds for the community or another project. The RTIF will not support commercial activities. You should make clear your proposed charges at the time of the application.

11. Can volunteer time be used as Match Funding for the RTIF?

Volunteer time can be used as match funding for the RTIF however timesheets must be kept for each volunteer, recording the number of hours on the project and these must be charged at the rate for the Scottish Living Wage. This is currently set at £9.40 per hour

12. Are legal fees and statutory planning fees eligible costs under the RTIF?

Legal fees associated with the project and statutory planning fees are eligible costs.

13. Can pre-project fees be included as eligible costs?

Pre-contract fees such as design fees or QS fees are eligible however this is at the applicant's own risk and the applicant must assume the cost of this if the application is unsuccessful. In kind project management costs cannot be claimed prior to the start of the project but can be claimed during the project delivery.

14. What if the land or building that I want to use is leased rather than owned?

You can undertake work on a site that you do not own but lease if the lease is for a minimum of 20 years following the completion of the project. However, you cannot use annual lease costs as match funding or include them in the costs as these are revenue costs which are not eligible

15. Is VAT included in the RTIF Grant award?

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Award is not subject to VAT and any Award made is inclusive of VAT if any, payable thereon. Under no circumstances will the Award be increased, should any VAT liability arise for the applicant and any third party partners. It will be the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that their treatment of VAT relative to the Award is correct.

16. Do I need to submit an Expression of Interest Application or can I just submit a full application?

No, applicants can submit an application without having submitted an EOI however we would strongly advise applicants to seek guidance from the RTIF Team prior to submitting an application. The EOI form has been designed to be as brief as possible to enable the RTIF team to give you rapid feedback on your project so that you do not incur costs etc. unnecessarily. The RTIF team is there to assist you with any queries pre application and you should contact the team at RTIF@visitscotland.com to discuss your project.

17. What is the Application Process for submissions to the RTIF?

Applications to the RTIF area being conducted under a 2-stage process. The Stage 1 Expressions of Interest assessment is based on the limited information submitted on the EOI and enables a basic eligibility check to be undertaken and some feedback to be given to applicants. **The invitation to proceed to Stage 2 and submit a full application is not a guarantee that your project will be approved by the Assessment panel.**

18. Who will be on the Assessment panel for the RTIF?

The Assessment Panel will examine the Stage 2 applications in detail and the panel consists of representatives of Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, COSLA, Scottish Natural Heritage, Architecture and Design Scotland as well as VisitScotland.

19. What criteria will be used in the Assessment process?

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund is designed to support sustainable, well planned, inspiring and collaborative infrastructure projects in rural areas that are experiencing pressures as a result of increased visitor numbers. Applications must show a strong emphasis on quality and

sustainable development practices and a fit with a local tourism plan or regional tourism strategy.

Priority will be given to applications will meet the following objectives:

- **Visitor Pressure Point** - Have an existing visitor/community pressure point because of an increase in visitor numbers which has been evidenced through statistics, photographic evidence, visitor surveys, social media reviews etc. This should be specific to the site in question
- **An enhanced visitor experience** – through the provision of improved visitor facilities and infrastructure, particularly in areas that have experienced pressure from increased visitor numbers, leading to a positive impact on the local landscape and visitor economy. Applicants must be able to demonstrate how the activity proposed will address the issues raised as a result of the visitor pressure point.

Please demonstrate how your project complies with, and exceeds, where possible, the requirements of the Equality Act.

- **A sustainable approach** – applicants are expected to take a strategic and long term approach in their planning, use of materials, impact on the environment and legacy implications of the asset created after project completion. There is an expectation that approved applications will need to show evidence of and commitment to on-going maintenance after project completion
- **Community capacity building** – create more resilient communities more able to cope with peak tourism demands and the creation of new local business opportunities
- **Effective partnerships and collaboration** – engagement with local community groups, destination organisations and tourism businesses, demonstrating how partnership working can increase awareness, advocacy and the quality of the final project. There should be strong buy-in and project support from local communities and tourism groups
- **Project viability and deliverability** – applicants must provide evidence of:
 - A clear strategic rationale and proposition for the proposed activity
 - Proven experience of project management and financial administration
 - A clear timetable for procurement, site start date and expected time of completion
 - A clear delivery plan demonstrating value for money and measurable outputs
 - Detailed costs and a budget forecast for the period of the project.

Priority may be given to applications which can demonstrate a higher level of match funding

20. What is the timescale for decisions?

The timescale for Round 2 of the RTIF is outlined below

Round 2	
Expression of Interest deadline	31 October 2018
Feedback completed with VS comments	30 November 2018
Final application Deadline	31 January 2019
Assessment Panel Date	21 March 2019
Applicants Advised of outcome	4 April 2019
Completion Date for all Round 2 Applications	30 September 2020

21. Can I start my project while I am waiting to hear the outcome of the Assessment panel?

No grants will be awarded retrospectively. Applicants must ensure no on-site activity commences prior to the RTIF Grant Agreement being signed. This does not include pre-contract costs such as survey or design work etc.

22. How will the grant award be paid?

50% of the RTIF grant award will be paid on the completion of the contract agreement process with the Applicant. A further 40% of the grant award will be paid on certification that the project has spent 50% of the agreed project costs and the submission of an Interim Claim form. The final 10% will be paid on completion of the project and receipt of the Final Claim Monitoring and Evaluation report. Payments can only be made to the project applicant which will be the Local Authority or National Park Authority who will then be responsible for onward payments to delivery agents.

23. What happens if the project overspends?

The RTIF cannot make up the difference in costs should you overspend on the project costs. Any award made is a maximum amount and cannot be increased later. You must ensure that you have a reasonable level of contingencies within your budget to allow for unforeseen problems during the project.

24. What happens if my project underspends?

The RTIF will not pay you more than the agreed Intervention rate in your Grant Agreement. If your projects underspends, then you will only be entitled to your **actual** expenditure costs x the agreed intervention rate. This may mean that you might have to repay any grant already paid.

25. How long do Applicants have to claim the grant award?

The 2nd round of the RTIF runs until 30th September 2020. The final claim for projects should be submitted within 1 month of the completion of the project and all documentation must be submitted no later than the longstop date above.

26. What evidence is needed to demonstrate project benefits/outcomes?

Ideally, follow-up survey work should be undertaken of both community and visitors to determine improved visitor and community satisfaction. This will be particularly useful if you were able to provide a pre project survey which would enable comparison between the before and after picture. Photographic evidence of the project site before and on completion of the project or reports demonstrating a reduced impact on the environment would be desirable. The impact on local businesses in terms of improved business performance Inc. any new business start-ups should be supplied if appropriate.

27. How will my project be monitored by VisitScotland?

All projects will receive a monitoring visit on, at least, one payment point throughout the period of the contract. All supporting documentation, including pre project design, project costs and procurement must be retained and made available to the RTIF team at the time of the visit.