Scotland’s Tour Guides Fund

Guidance for applicants

Background

On 4th February 2021, the Scottish Government announced a funding package to help businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector to survive the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This resulted in the creation of the Tour Guides Fund (the “Fund”) to specifically support the tour guiding sector in Scotland. The tour guiding sector has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, yet their contribution to visitors’ memorable experiences is substantial. The Fund aims to help keep tour guides operating while restrictions on opening and travel are still in place, and to support them to prepare to operate in 2021 when restrictions are lifted.

Businesses can only be successful and receive a grant award from one of the funds announced by the Scottish Government on or since 15th December 2020 to help the tourism and events industries to survive the impacts of COVID-19, regardless of the body who is administering the fund. The tourism announcement was made by the Scottish Government on 21st December 2020. This does not mean that businesses cannot apply to multiple funds if they meet the relevant eligibility requirements. However, you must withdraw your application from all other funds and reject any other grant offers if you have accepted a grant award. After 31st March 2021, some applications may be chosen at random to be audited. Any applicants who have been found to have provided incorrect information or received multiple awards will be expected to return their awarded grant.

The Fund

What is the purpose of this Fund?

This Fund recognises the critical role that guided experiences play in the visitor economy, welcoming visitors to Scotland and sharing their knowledge and passion in order to provide a memorable experience and world-class service.

What is the budget for this fund?

The total budget for the Fund is £3 million. The Fund is being delivered on behalf of the Scottish Government by VisitScotland, with development input from the Scottish Tourist Guides Association and other industry partners. VisitScotland is the awarding body for this Fund.
Who is this Fund for?

This Fund is intended to support tour guides who are facing financial hardship due to the impact of COVID-19. Applications are limited to one application per business.

What is the process and timeline for the Fund?

1. Businesses which meet all the eligibility criteria will be able to submit an application form from 12 noon on 3 March 2021 to 17.00 hrs on 10 March 2021 via the form available on https://www.visitscotland.org/supporting-your-business/funding/tour-guide-fund/apply. Any applications received after this period will not be considered. Applications will not be assessed on a first come, first served basis.

2. Following the assessment of all the applications, a panel consisting of VisitScotland staff will make the final decisions on those who are eligible to receive funding. Applications will also be reviewed by Chiene + Tait, an accountancy firm procured by VisitScotland, who will review and assess the financial evidence submitted with the application.

3. If your application is rejected, you can appeal this decision. Any appeals should be submitted in writing to TourGuidesFundAppeals@visitscotland.com together with a justification for the appeal. Appeals will be reviewed by VisitScotland and a representative from the Scottish Tourist Guides Association.

Eligibility Criteria

As part of the application form, businesses will be asked to provide information which confirms that they meet all of the following eligibility criteria:

- At least 75% of the business’s guided tours, activities and experiences must take place within Scotland;
- Must have a permanent place of business in Scotland (registered business address or premises);
- Business activities must meet the definition of ‘tour guiding’ as defined in the ‘Definition of a Tour Guide’ section of this guidance document;
- Business must have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 which has resulted in your business turnover being at least 50% less than as recorded in your last set of annual accounts;
- The business must be intending to trade in 2021, when restrictions allow;
- The business must not have been in financial difficulty as at 31 December 2019 if you are a SME or Large organisation (please see the Subsidy Control section in the Guidance document for more information).
**Definition of a Tour Guide**

A tourist guide is traditionally defined as:

A person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area, which person normally possesses an area-specific qualification usually issued and/or recognised by the appropriate authority.

(European Standard EN15565).

For the purposes of this Fund, ‘Tour Guiding’ activity could include, but is not limited to:

- Accompanying individuals or groups with the purpose of guiding them in a tour or activity as part of a memorable visitor experience (e.g. regional tour, city tour or themed tour such as castles/heritage), with or without a vehicle.

- Guiding individuals or groups in a particular skill/activity or sharing knowledge of a particular topic or region, where the activity is designed to meet the needs of visitors to the area (e.g. guided kayaking, wildlife watching, or skiing).

- Provision of a specific guided experience within one’s own home or land, which is designed to be of interest to visitors to the area (e.g. foraging, whisky-tasting or traditional Scottish crafts).

The fund is **not** intended to support:

- Any business that offers guided activities serving, wholly or mainly, a local market.

- Tour operators and experience providers that do not deliver guided activities.

- Registered taxi license holders, chauffeur companies or Private Hire Vehicle licensed operators, unless they can demonstrate that they offer guided tours.

- Riding schools for lessons

- Indoor and outdoor sports activities, e.g. football, golf, tennis, netball etc.

- Outdoor/ indoor activity/ sports clubs, leisure and training centres

- Dry ski slopes

- Karting centres

*Please note this list is not exhaustive, and we reserve the right to add further ineligible categories during the assessment process for the purposes of clarity.*
Additional Information

In addition to the eligibility criteria, businesses will be asked to provide the following additional information in their application:

- Name of applicant organisation
- Trading name if different
- Address (inc. postcode)
- Local authority
- One of the following:
  - National VAT Number
  - Company Registration Number
  - HMRC Unique Tax Reference Number
  - Charity Registration Number
- Size of organisation
- NACE Code
- Membership, if any, of industry body
- Confirmation of any COVID-19 related aid/support already approved/received in 2020 under the Temporary Framework, including the amount of each
- Confirmation of whether you intend to apply for or have applied for or have received any of the other funding support announced by the Scottish Government since 15th December 2020
- Name of person completing application form
- Position within organisation
- Email address
- Mobile contact number
- Organisation website/web presence
- Confirmation that you meet the eligibility criteria set out earlier in this guidance document
- Name of bank
- Name on bank account
- Sort Code
- Account Number
Supporting Documentation

- Annual accounts for 2019/20 year which have been audited/verified by an accountant or copy of filed tax return for 2019/20 to verify income from guiding activity. Businesses with a year end after 31 December 2019 can submit the previous year if these are their latest set of accounts;

- Valid annual insurance document to cover public liability for the year ending in 2020/21 tax year. If insurance is obtained through STGA membership, please ensure you have indicated you are a member in the application form. If you have cancelled or allowed your public liability insurance to lapse because you have been unable to operate in the current circumstances, we will accept your most recent insurance policy or other suitable evidence of business trading;

- Bank statement for December 2020 (redacted statements will be accepted provided bank name, sort code and account number are clearly shown).

How much funding can successful applicants expect to receive?

The Scottish Government has allocated a set amount for this Fund (£3 million) and it is anticipated that demand will be high across the industry. In determining eligibility for grant support regard will be given to the above criteria and the supporting information provided.

Please note that any award amount indications set out in this document are for guidance only, are expressed as “up to” a certain amount and are dependent on the number of successful applications to this Fund. We reserve the right to award an amount lower than the indications provided in this document.

Due to the limited amount of funding available, and in the interest of fairness, the final amount awarded to a successful applicant will be determined once all applications are received and vetted. A flat amount will be awarded to each successful applicant, up to a maximum of £5,000 per business.

If your income from Tour Guiding as set out in your 19/20 audited accounts or tax return is less than the flat amount to be awarded to successful applicants under this Fund, your grant award will be reduced so that you do not receive a grant award which is greater than your 19/20 income from Tour Guiding.

We expect this Fund to be oversubscribed but, in the event that there are unallocated funds within the Fund budget once all applications have been received and assessed, this will be awarded on a pro rata basis across all successful applicants.

Accessibility, Terms and Conditions and Freedom of Information

If you are successful, you must sign and return the grant award letter and accept the terms and conditions before the funds will be paid into the organisation’s bank account. Successful applicants will be required to provide a report within 6 months of the grant award being made to assess the value of the grant and the impact of the funding on their organisation. If you receive grant funding from this Fund and it is subsequently determined that you have provided false or inaccurate information as part of your application, VisitScotland will seek to recover, with costs, all sums awarded to you from this Fund.
VisitScotland is subject to the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and may be obliged to release information about your application or grant award in response to any requests received. Information on all grant awards will be published in the UK subsidy control transparency database and will be made available to other Scottish public sector bodies.

If you require the forms to be made available to you in another format for accessibility reasons, please contact TourGuidesFundEnquiries@visitscotland.com.

Data Protection

We will use the data provided by you in the application form and supporting documentation to assess your application for grant funding and contact you regarding your application. Your data will be shared with the Scottish Government, relevant local authorities, other Scottish public sector bodies and/or enterprise agencies for verification and reporting purposes and with Chiene + Tait Chartered Accountants, an accountancy firm procured by VisitScotland, to complete the finance checks, and in case of appeals with industry representatives from the Scottish Tourist Guides Association (who will form part of the appeals panel). If you want to find out more about what we do with your data, please see our Privacy Policy.

Completing the digital forms

Please ensure that you have all information and supporting documentation ready so you can complete and submit the relevant form in one sitting as, once you start to complete the form, you will be unable to save it and return to it later. Supporting documentation must be submitted in pdf, word, excel, png or jpeg formats. The maximum file size for each document is 10MB.

All the mandatory fields within the form must be completed before the Application form can be submitted. Should you miss any mandatory information or enter any information incorrectly, you will not be able to submit the form. The field(s) requiring attention will be highlighted and you will be required to complete / correct these before you are able to submit. You will also be required to upload your supporting documentation to the form again.

Supported browsers for these forms are up to date versions of Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Edge, and Internet Explorer 11. We cannot guarantee successful operation / submission on older browser versions.

You may also find it easier to complete from a device with a larger screen, such as a desktop computer or laptop, rather than a mobile device. If you still have issues or require a different format for accessibility reasons, please contact TourGuidesFundEnquiries@visitscotland.com.

Subsidy Control

Confirmation of subsidies received and Undertaking in Difficulty Status

Following the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020, a new Subsidy Control regime came into effect in the UK at 11pm on 31 December. The Temporary Framework under which COVID-19 related funding was issued in 2020 no longer applies. VisitScotland is currently awaiting guidance from the Scottish Government as to the basis under which the funding under this Fund will be awarded. It is intended that the award will be made under similar terms to COVID-19 schemes in operation before the 1 January 2021
and, if necessary, additional information will be provided to successful applicants in the award letter and terms and conditions.

In your application you will be asked to declare any aid already approved/received under the Temporary Framework in 2020.

You may need to declare any amount received under this Fund to any other aid awarding body who requests information from you on how much aid you have received. You must retain the award letter for four years from the date of the letter and produce it on any request from the UK public authorities or the European Commission.

A subsidy may be granted to undertakings (SME / Large undertakings) that were not in difficulty, but that faced difficulties or entered in difficulty thereafter as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. The subsidy is in addition to any aid that you may have received under the De Minimis regulation allowing aid of up to €200,000 to any one organisation over a three fiscal year period (i.e. your current fiscal year and previous two fiscal years). If you are a micro or small undertaking you may be granted aid even if you would fall under the category of undertaking in financial difficulty on 31 December 2019, provided that you are not subject to collective insolvency procedure under national law and that you have not received rescue aid (which has not been repaid) or restructuring aid (and are still subject to a restricting plan).

• A micro or small organisation is an undertaking that has less than 50 employees and less than 10 million euros of annual turnover and/or balance sheet.

• A SME organisation is an undertaking that has 50 or more employees and 10 million euros or more of annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet.

• A large organisation is an undertaking that has 250 or more employees and 50 million euros or more of annual turnover and/or 43 million euro annual balance sheet.

**Undertakings in Difficulty Assessment**

In your application you will be asked to declare that on 31 December 2019, you did not meet any of the criteria to be considered an undertaking in difficulty.

‘undertaking in difficulty’ is defined for the purposes of this scheme as an undertaking in respect of which at least one of the following circumstances occurs:

(a) In the case of a limited liability company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its subscribed share capital has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. This is the case when deduction of accumulated losses from reserves (and all other elements generally considered as part of the own funds of the company) leads to a negative cumulative amount that exceeds half of the subscribed share capital.
or

(b) In the case of a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its capital as shown in the company accounts has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses.

and

(c) Where the undertaking is subject to collective insolvency proceedings or fulfils the criteria under its domestic law for being placed in collective insolvency proceedings at the request of its creditors.

and

(d) Where the undertaking has received rescue aid and has not yet reimbursed the loan or terminated the guarantee or has received restructuring aid and is still subject to a restructuring plan.