

Collaborative Funding Opportunities

InterTradelreland Innovation Pilot Project *Collab* Call -

For the submission of proposals from delivery agents/contractor(s) to design and deliver pilot supports to benefit SMEs / Academics / Researchers across the island of Ireland.

Background

InterTradelreland is the All-Island Trade and Business Development Body, one of six North South Implementation Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement. In this capacity it acts as the All-island Economic Development Agency. It is funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) in Ireland and the Department for the Economy (DfE) in Northern Ireland.

InterTradelreland is the only organisation that has been given responsibility by both governments to boost North-South economic cooperation to the mutual benefit of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The agency's remit is to 'exchange information and coordinate work on trade, business development and related matters, in areas where the two administrations specifically agree it would be in their mutual interest.

InterTradelreland achieves its legislative remit through several means, including:

- Connecting and helping businesses across the island to trade cross-border, collaborate, innovate and attract investment.
- Business and economic research which provides insight and foresight for policy makers and a robust evidence base to design initiatives that support businesses.
- Collaboration with stakeholders across the island to fulfil its unique role to accelerate economic growth through identification and delivery of shared policy priorities in both jurisdictions.

InterTradelreland's Corporate Plan 2023 – 2025 outlines the agency's ambition:

- Vision: A globally competitive all island business ecosystem that advances both economies
- Mission: To provide leadership, advice, and support to maximise export growth opportunities through greater Cross-Border collaboration, innovation, entrepreneurship, and trade.

InterTradelreland Innovation Pilot Projects *Collab* Call - May 2025

What is the Collab Call?

Leading by doing, learning by collaborating.

Collaboration is in our DNA at InterTradelreland. Established over 25 years ago, our work in innovation has focused on key initiatives and supports to deliver upon ambitious strategic priorities. Specifically, innovation supports have included technology transfer programmes, cluster development expertise and business to business collaborative R&D project development and delivery.

Currently InterTradelreland offers tailored supports to SMEs, Academics and Researchers through an innovation pathway. The pathway includes funded supports, guidance, signposting and partnership cultivation enabling the utilization of opportunities that include adoption and integration of new technologies, development and delivery of collaborative innovation activities embedding structured innovation practice.

To gain further insight and inform future programme activities, a focused pulse survey was conducted with 400 SMEs in the manufacturing / tradeable services sector from across the island, North and South. The survey provided detailed insights into the understanding and attitudes to innovation and levels of innovative activity among businesses, indicative of businesses that export or have potential to export.

The Pulse survey results reinforced a recurring theme, indicating that whilst businesses are adept to responding to day-to-day challenges, they lack time, opportunity and the knowledge required for strategic and focused innovation.

To build upon the current pathway of supports and respond to evolving innovation needs, **InterTradelreland wishes to explore potential opportunities to co-create new supports, models and methods to SMEs/academics/researchers through targeted engagement with innovation delivery specialists in the eco-system for the benefit of the economy across the island.**

This unique invitation to collaborate with InterTradelreland is intended to engage the knowledge and experience of service providers / delivery agents / knowledge centres and others delivering innovation activities/education and services within the eco-system across the island.

The call aims to collaborate directly with delivery agents/consultants/contractors enabling submission of proposals which have potential as pilot innovation projects funded by InterTradelreland.

Our ambition is to explore the potential of the eco-system with those who operate within it. Leveraging our experience at InterTradelreland in building impactful partnerships and your insights, experience and expertise, **this call aims to initiate engagement to deliver original proposals which will test the market, deliver tangible benefits to businesses / academics / researchers on the island, increase strategic and engaged innovation activity and inform future programme development and delivery through a co-creation approach.**

Fund available

The initial total fund for early pilot proposals is valued at £1million and participation in the pilot initiative will inform future programme design, development and delivery.

The maximum value of any one proposal must not exceed £0.5m. InterTradelreland reserves the right to only accept the information provided within the submitted Pilot Proposal form and to seek external advice to inform our assessment process, depending on the nature and content of the application. Further information may be requested upon assessment of applications.

What outcomes are we looking for

The proposed proposals will deliver outcomes which respond to those detailed in the InterTradelreland's Corporate Plan 2023-25 targeting the following:

- Greater economic inclusivity and spread of economic benefit across the regions of the respective jurisdictions.
- Creation of new opportunities throughout the island, acting as a stimulus for greater productivity
- More new exporters and more cross-border exports
- More SMEs engaged in collaborative innovation
- Higher levels of cross-border collaboration and stronger clusters and networks
- A connected, vibrant, all island entrepreneurship ecosystem with more investor ready businesses

Pilot proposals should

- Clearly outline the intended beneficiaries, providing detail on the rationale, relevance and appropriateness of the support.
- Give consideration to lead generation that may include an activity plan. The proposal should consider and include details of the delivery agent/contractor(s) planned activity, including timings, how potential participants/recipients will be recruited, being cognizant of the strategic objectives of InterTradelreland as the all-island economic development agency.
- Detail any qualitative and quantitative expected outcomes/outputs.
- Provide an outline of the intended delivery model and tools for measurement and reporting. This may include detail of what this will include e.g. participant testimonials, case studies.
- Clearly outline how the proposal addresses the selected problem statement in the context of the island, North and South.
- Consider and where appropriate, include details of any collaborative activities which form part of the proposal providing explanation for the rationale for the collaboration and potential added value/benefit.

Potential Pilot project recipients

InterTradelreland are keen to engage with delivery agents in the co-creation of innovation pilot projects that may engage businesses, academics and/or researchers. The proposed pilots can address a specific segment within any of these categories or offer benefit to more than one through collaborative partnership. Potential programme participants may include SME's (Manufacturing and Tradeable Services prioritised but not exclusive), leaders within SME's, researchers, academics or others. Eligibility for participation by recipients should be considered and aligned with the strategic objectives of InterTradelreland.

Specific areas of focus for potential pilot proposals may include but not be limited to;

- **Innovation skills development** - design thinking, prototyping, or digital transformation for the benefit of SME's on the island.
- **Innovation leadership skills development** – bespoke for CEO's, MD's or others.
- Proposals which **initiate and facilitate mutually beneficial partnership / collaboration focused on innovation activities** in different forms – this may include, business to business, researcher to business, academic to academic, academic to business or a group.
- **Sustainability** – practical, SME pitched.
- **Technology adoption** for the benefit of increasing competitiveness and efficiency.
- **Data access, literacy and utilisation** activities.
- **Knowledge Transfer Mechanisms:** Tools, platforms, or programs to help translate findings into market-ready innovations.

Pilot duration

There is no minimum duration for pilot proposals and a maximum duration of 12 months. The cost of a proposal should be commensurate to the type and duration of support delivered.

Pilot call priorities

This pilot call seeks innovative proposals from delivery agents—including contractors, consultants, businesses, or collaborative partnerships—that can design and deliver targeted supports to address the innovation needs and opportunities of SMEs, researchers, and academics across the island of Ireland.

The overarching aim is to **create demonstrable impact** for these groups—either individually or in partnership—through collaborative, innovative approaches that enhance capacity, generate economic benefit, and contribute to shared learning.

Priority Areas for the Pilot

1. **Develop and deliver a tailored support programme** that addresses specific innovation challenges or opportunities faced by SMEs, researchers, and academics. Solutions may support these groups individually or through strategic partnerships and should be deliverable on an all-island basis.
2. **All proposals will be assessed against core criteria**, however, priority will be given to submissions that clearly demonstrate all-island economic benefit.

3. Proposals should include clear **evidence of non-duplication or displacement** of existing supports, demonstrating a unique or complementary offering.
4. As this is a **pilot initiative**, preference will be given to proposals that clearly demonstrate:
 - A clear rationale for targeting a specific audience, and an approach that ensures reach and relevance across the island;
 - An ability to **test and trial solutions**, providing insights to inform future programme design and support mechanisms;
 - A contribution to understanding the **real-world innovation challenges and opportunities** experienced by SMEs, researchers, and academics;
 - **Networking and peer-to-peer learning** opportunities that build cross-border connections and communities of practice.
5. **Delivery agents must demonstrate their capability and relevant experience** to deliver the programme at the scale and scope proposed. Collaborative submissions involving more than one provider are welcome. Providers can submit more than one proposal, each proposal will be assessed individually.

Eligible supports may include, but are not limited to:

- Programme management and coordination;
- Mentoring and advisory supports;
- Training initiatives and workshops;
- Outreach, and participant engagement
- Events, conferences, and knowledge-sharing platforms;

Proposals should clearly demonstrate that the primary benefit of the proposed support will be realised by the intended recipients—SMEs, researchers, and/or academics. Please be aware that some costs, including flights, hospitality, and similar discretionary expenses, are typically not eligible for funding. If awarded funding, reimbursement of costs will be made retrospectively upon submission and approval of agreed evidenced expenditure, reflecting InterTradelreland's standard funding process.

The pilot is designed to deliver meaningful and measurable outcomes for participants. As such, **proposals should focus on maximising value for beneficiaries, ensuring that resources are directed toward activities and interventions that directly support innovation, capacity building, and collaborative impact.**

Innovative and creative approaches are encouraged, particularly those offering scalable, transferable, or collaborative solutions that directly support capacity building, innovation, and economic impact.

State Aid

InterTradelreland will work collaboratively with the selected delivery agent to assess any state aid implications and to identify any necessary notification and reporting requirements for proposals that progress to the approval stage.

Monitoring and Evaluation

At the commencement of each programme, performance targets will be agreed between InterTradelreland and the appointed delivery agent. A SMART Objectives Action Plan (to follow the guidance on the next page) must be attached to the application from.

To support effective oversight, performance targets will be agreed with delivery agents before issuing a letter of offer for any successful pilot proposal, in line with InterTradelreland's monitoring requirements.

Monitoring will be based on regular information sharing to track progress against agreed outputs and timelines. A collaborative, results-focused approach will help ensure we stay aligned on both delivery and long-term impact.

As a pilot initiative, the core aim is to generate shared learning and create opportunities for genuine co-creation. Insights from this process will play a key role in shaping the development and delivery of potential future programmes. Proposals should therefore include a clear breakdown of the categories of data to be collected, including data sources, reporting formats, and the frequency of reporting.

Delivery agents should also demonstrate a commitment to collaboration by outlining how proposed activities could meaningfully inform future programme design. Flexibility within the programme structure is essential and should allow for iterative learning, responsiveness to feedback, and continuous refinement in partnership with InterTradelreland.

Specific	Measurable	Agreed	Realistic	Time-Bound
<p>What is the goal?</p> <p>Exactly what is it you want to achieve from your programme and scoping study process?</p> <p>Specific goals should explain the what, why, who, where and when of a goal. If your goal statement/s is/are vague, you will find it hard to achieve because it will be difficult to define success.</p>	<p>You must be able to track progress and measure the result of your goal. A good goal statement answers the question, how much or how many. How will I know when I have achieved my goal?</p>	<p>Your goal must be relevant to the members and your stakeholders and agreed with them. How can we accomplish this goal. How realistic is the goal, based on other constraints, such as finance, resources, timing, and regulatory, technical and operational limits?</p>	<p>The network goals should be stretching, but realistic and relevant to you, your company, the members and stakeholders. Make sure the actions you need to take to achieve the goals are things within the network members' control. Are the goals achievable?</p>	<p>Goals must have a deadline. A good goal statement will answer the question, when will we achieve the goals which we have set out? Without time limits, it's easy to put goals off and leave them to die. As well as a deadline, it's a good idea to set some short-term milestones along the way to help you measure progress</p>

Considerations?

Areas to review the strength of the proposal's will include;

- alignment with InterTradelreland strategic objectives to increase innovation activity across the island,
- evidence that the challenge or opportunity does exist, and
- relevance and appropriateness of the solution in addressing the detailed opportunity or challenge faced by the specified beneficiaries,
- uniqueness of the intervention,
- potential for future delivery,
- proposers/promoters background and experience,
- methodology,
- value for money and,
- consideration of additionality or displacement.

InterTradelreland *Collab* Call is seeking to initiate collaborations between experienced delivery agents* who can design and deliver pilot programmes which are not currently accessible for SME's/academics/researchers, addressing gaps in innovation support provision. Proposals may be focused on addressing immediate unmet needs or provide access to future focused opportunities.

***Delivery agent:**

- may be an individual business / organisation who can demonstrate an ability to deliver innovation support programmes across the island (Northern Ireland and Ireland)

-or delivery agents working in partnership who can demonstrate an ability to deliver innovation support programmes across the island (Northern Ireland and Ireland)

Proposal Review and approval process

It is anticipated that pilot projects of differing scope and scale will be awarded funding from InterTradelreland for delivery commencing in 2025/2026. Following submission, proposals will initially be evaluated by the Innovation & Entrepreneurship team. Proposals will be ranked using a scoring system, with the highest-scoring submissions progressing to subsequent stages of review.

Approval for the highest ranked pilot proposals will be sought from the InterTradelreland Board. It is anticipated these proposals will be submitted to the Board for approval from June 2025 onwards until funding allocation is complete. Proposals with fewer setup complexities will be prioritised for initial implementation.

This call will prioritise the most impactful proposals for funding. However, this initial engagement is the commencement of a process and further calls for proposals and programme development opportunities are anticipated, subject to approval.

Timings

The Innovation call will be open from Tuesday 6th May 2025 to Wednesday 4th June 2025.

All submitted proposals will be scored and ranked by an InterTradelreland panel against the criteria provided see Page 9. All submissions and any attached documents must be received by email to collabcall@intertradeireland.com by 5pm on 4th June 2025.

Any appendices attached to proposals are strictly limited to 5 A4 pages. Pages in excess of this limit will not be accepted.

Submission and Scoring?

InterTradelreland will only accept the information provided within the submitted proposal form.

Please ensure that indicative branding and PR requirements have been adequately built into your programme plan, including additional costing if necessary.

Summary Assessment Scoring Procedure

Stage One

1. Alignment for InterTradelreland Innovation Pilot Project *Collab* Call:
 - i. Does not fit InterTradelreland priorities – rejection letter should be issued.
 - ii. Needs further development, if possible, to fit InterTradelreland priorities
 - iii. Fits within InterTradelreland priorities? -Proceed to full scoring.

State what key principle of the InterTradelreland Corporate Plan 2023-2025 the programme delivers against?

- Greater economic inclusivity and spread of economic benefit across the regions of the respective jurisdictions.
- Creation of new opportunities throughout the island, acting as a stimulus for greater productivity
- More new exporters and more cross-border exports
- More SMEs engaged in collaborative innovation
- Higher levels of cross-border collaboration and stronger clusters and networks
- A connected, vibrant, all island entrepreneurship ecosystem with more investor ready businesses

Stage Two

- Proposals proceeding to scoring A – E (maximum score 5 per section, overall maximum score 25).
- No programme should be recommended, which scores less than 17.5 (70%)
- Programmes scoring less than 3 in any of the criteria should not be recommended.

Scoring Table

Scoring Criteria	Score out of 5	Weighted Score	Final score
<p>A. Project / programme design and methodology</p> <p>Rationale for proposed approach. Use of evidence-based methodologies; Evidence of demand led or challenge driven design; Alignment with strategic objectives; Inclusion of co-creation or user-centred design elements, flexibility / adaptability for pilot conditions; Scalability / adaptability</p>		1	
<p>B. Team Experience and Expertise</p> <p>Track record of delivery agent(s); experience in delivery of similar innovation initiatives; qualifications of team members / collaborative partners (facilitators / members) and relevant sector expertise; knowledge of SME / academic contexts; team capacity</p>		1	
<p>C. Project Management & Delivery</p> <p>Timelines and milestones (including high-level delivery timeline); communication and reporting plans; participant/beneficiary recruitment activity and plan; resource allocation and delivery capacity; risk identification and mitigation strategies; flexibility; collaboration with InterTradeIreland</p>		1	
<p>D. Learning, Impact & Evaluation</p> <p>KPIs; data capture; learning approach; pilot evaluation outputs</p>		1	
<p>E. Cost & Value for Money</p> <p>Budget clarity and breakdown; Justification of costs; Cost-effectiveness relative to outputs/outcomes; Flexibility within budget for iterations or scaling</p>		1	
Total Score out of 25			

When scoring questions with multiple sub headings, assessors should take account of all elements of the answers provided and apply a cumulative score based between 0 – 5 as per the scoring guidance below. Please note that this is guidance and it cannot take account of every possible scoring eventuality. Assessors should base final scores on his/her judgement.

Key to scoring

Score	Descriptor
0	Failed to answer any elements of any of the questions
1	Poor response to each question, or a mixture of poor and limited responses for each subheading
2	Limited response to each question, or a mixture of poor, limited and acceptable answers for each subheading
3	Acceptable response to answer each question, or a mixture of limited, acceptable and good answers for each subheading
4	Good response to answer each question, or a mixture of acceptable, good and excellent answers for each subheading
5	Excellent response to answer each question, or a mixture of good and excellent answers to each question IF the assessor feels that the overwhelming answer merits an Excellent score

Clarification questions

If you require any clarification regarding the information provided in the above Terms of Reference and guidance notes or advice concerning the questions within the application, you can contact InterTradeIreland at:

Tel: 028 3083 4100 (048 from Ireland)

Email: collabcall@intertradeireland.com

What happens if your proposal is unsuccessful?

There is no entitlement to a monetary award. The funding limit for this call is £1million. InterTradeIreland must prioritise those proposals which will have a greater impact on our priorities. All applications will be scored against the criteria set out in this document. Should more proposals than available funds meet the criteria, additional solutions may be explored depending upon necessary approvals.