



Innovation Vouchers Reference Document

Enterprise Ireland Innovation Vouchers Programme

The Innovation Voucher Programme was developed to build links between Ireland's publicly funded Knowledge Providers (Higher Education Institutes, Public research bodies) and small and medium Irish companies.

Vouchers (referred to as Innovation Vouchers) worth (up to) €10,000 are available to assist a company or companies to explore a business opportunity or problem with a registered knowledge provider.

Eligibility & Exclusions

The Innovation Voucher Programme is open to all small and medium-sized* limited companies registered in Ireland and applications are not restricted to clients of Enterprise Ireland.

Exclusions:

- Small and medium-sized enterprises in the agricultural sector are excluded in line with State aid guidelines.
- Companies with charitable status, commercial semi-state companies, "not for profit" organisations, trade associations, holding companies, company representation bodies such as Chambers of Commerce, Sports Bodies & Associations, Sports Clubs and other non-commercial bodies or associations are not eligible to participate in the innovation voucher initiative.

****Small and medium-sized company definition (SME):*** For the purposes of the Innovation Voucher Initiative, a small and medium-sized enterprise is defined as a company or (if part of a group) a group of companies where the total number of full-time employees in the company (or the entire group) is less than 250 and has an annual turnover total not exceeding €50m and/or an annual Balance Sheet total not exceeding €43m. (Exclusions: small and medium-sized enterprises in the agricultural sector are excluded in line with State aid guidelines).

Eligibility Criteria and Conditions of Use

- Small and medium-sized companies may make use of a maximum of four vouchers over a rolling 5 year period, one of which must be a 50-50 co-funded voucher.
- Companies that have been approved in excess of €300,000 (includes funding under the Enterprise Ireland Innovation Partnership programme) funding from Enterprise Ireland in the previous 5 years are not eligible to apply for a fully funded 10k Standard Innovation Voucher, but are eligible to apply for a Co-Funded Innovation Voucher provided they satisfy all other eligibility criteria.
- A company may have one 'active' voucher at any point in time. Companies should ensure that the current voucher has been redeemed by the knowledge provider before applying for a subsequent voucher.

- Companies are not be eligible for further vouchers until their accounts with the knowledge providers are settled in full (including the payment of VAT).
- Vouchers will also be accepted by registered knowledge providers in Northern Ireland as part of Enterprise Ireland's arrangement with Invest Northern Ireland.
- Innovation Vouchers are exclusive of VAT and the company will be charged VAT by the Knowledge Provider and this cost must be settled separately by the company.

Types of Vouchers

There are 2 types of Voucher

1. Standard Voucher

Standard €10,000 vouchers are available to assist a company explore a business opportunity or problem, with a registered knowledge provider. A company can apply for one of these standard €10,000 vouchers at any time and a response may normally be expected within four weeks. Companies do not need to identify the knowledge provider in advance and they are valid for 18 months from the date of issue.

2. Co-funded Voucher

The value of the co-funded voucher is (up to) €10,000 and the company contributes 50% of the project costs in cash. Therefore, a company may use a co-funded voucher to cover project costs up to €20,000 on a 50-50 co-funded basis. The company and the knowledge provider jointly agree on the work programme for the project in advance of submitting an application. Companies may wish to use this option when they are no longer eligible for a standard voucher (may have used three standard vouchers within five years). This voucher application can be submitted at any time and a response may normally be expected within four weeks.

Permitted uses for a Voucher

Innovation Vouchers can be used for any kind of innovation such as:

- new product/process development;
- new business model development;
- new service delivery and customer interface;
- new service development;
- tailored training in innovation management;
- innovation/technology audit.

Vouchers can be exchanged for knowledge transfer projects from the knowledge provider.

For the purposes of this initiative, a knowledge transfer project is defined as one that transfers knowledge of a scientific, technological or innovative nature that it is new to the company. The company may then use the new knowledge to innovate a product, process or service.

Ineligible activities

The Innovation Voucher may not be used to cover the costs of:

1. achieving compliance with statutory regulations or legislation;
2. standard training courses;
3. software purchases and software development;
4. aid that would promote/subsidise the cost of exports;
5. internships for students of knowledge institutions;
6. design and production of advertising material; branding;
7. sales activities;
8. business plans, business strategies, economic appraisals, costs analysis, general business consultancy;
9. standard website development and online optimisation;
10. standard mobile applications development;
11. activities such as market research and market surveys that may be readily provided by the private sector;
12. calorie & nutritional analysis, recipe development etc. for all Food Service Outlet menus;
13. activities assisted by the mainstream funding mechanisms available from other Development Agencies such as the Local Enterprise Offices;
14. activities unlikely to result in commercial enterprise or business capable of generating jobs and/or exports;
15. advice or assistance with the following areas;
 - Legal
 - Commercial law
 - Patents
 - Taxation
 - Customs
16. Training and mentoring;
17. Marketing activities, digital marketing activities, marketing plans & strategies

If potential solutions to the knowledge question already exist in the marketplace, then Enterprise Ireland is likely to reject the application on the basis that the proposed activity may be undertaken by the private sector.

Application Process

The company submits a voucher application via the Enterprise Ireland Online Applications system and this can be done at any time.

Evaluation of the Application

Vouchers are awarded following a review of both the eligibility of the applicant and the proposed research question and typically about 80% of applications are successful. The main reasons for applications failing to be approved are; non-eligibility of the applicant, insufficient information, ineligible activity and low levels of innovation.

Applications are initially assessed by Enterprise Ireland against the following criteria:

- Whether the company is a limited company
- That the company in question does not have a current “Active” Voucher
- That the company has not received more than the maximum number of Vouchers permitted. The maximum number of vouchers per company is four within a rolling 5 year period, one of which must be a co-funded voucher between Enterprise Ireland and the company.
- That the company has received less than 300k funding from Enterprise Ireland in the previous 5 years.

- *Commission Regulation (EU) No 2023/2831 of 13th of December 2023 (De Minimis Aid Regulation)* – ensures that the company has received less than €300k in the previous 3 years as per EU State Aid rules.

If the application satisfies the above eligibility criteria, the application proceeds to an evaluation. The evaluation of the application must demonstrate that the proposed activity requires an innovative solution which will have additional value and on-going benefits for the company. Each application is assessed against an agreed list of eligible and ineligible activities. The full list of eligible and ineligible activities is available on the Enterprise Ireland website at www.innovationvouchers.ie

If the application is successful, the company will receive a voucher and the company is then free to use it with any of the participating knowledge providers listed on our website at www.innovationvouchers.ie

At project completion the company signs the ‘*Company Declaration at project completion*’ on the back of the voucher to confirm that the knowledge provide has completed the project to their satisfaction. Alternative confirmation such as a letter or email is acceptable.

The college invoices the company for the services provided. The voucher may then be used by the company in full or part payment against the invoice (excluding VAT which must be paid by the company).

The knowledge provider then redeems the Innovation Voucher with Enterprise Ireland by sending electronically, the signed voucher/completion confirmation, a copy of the invoice that issued to the company and a completed claim form to our Institutes Contracts Unit. On receipt of the full and correct documentation, Enterprise Ireland can redeem the voucher.

Appendix: Legislation - Environmental Compliance and Do No Significant Harm

Ireland’s National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) (2021-2026)

Under Ireland’s National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) (2021-2026), projects supporting the digital and climate transition of enterprise are being funded through the EU’s Recovery and Resilience Facility. This covers projects that will:

facilitate emissions reductions, or

support the digital transformation of the company, driving increased adoption and diffusion of digital technology



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Environmental Compliance and Do No Significant Harm

Projects supported under the NRRP for Innovation Vouchers must comply with relevant EU and national environmental legislation and in particular with the [‘Do no significant harm’ Technical Guidance \(2021/C58/01\)](#).

Specifically the following projects are not eligible:

- activities related to fossil fuels, including downstream use¹;
 - activities under the EU Emission Trading System (ETS) achieving projected greenhouse gas emissions that are not lower than the relevant benchmarks²;
 - activities related to waste landfills, incinerators³ and mechanical biological treatment plants⁴; and
 - activities where the long-term disposal of waste may cause harm to the environment.
1. Except projects under this measure in power and/or heat generation, as well as related transmission and distribution infrastructure, using natural gas, that are compliant with the conditions set out in Annex III of the ‘Do no significant harm’ Technical Guidance (2021/C58/01).
 2. Where the activity supported achieves projected greenhouse gas emissions that are not substantially lower than the relevant benchmarks an explanation of the reasons why this is not possible should be provided. Benchmarks established for free allocation for activities falling within the scope of the Emissions Trading System, as set out in the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/447.
 3. This exclusion does not apply to actions under this measure in plants exclusively dedicated to treating non-recyclable hazardous waste, and to existing plants, where the actions under this measure are for the purpose of increasing energy efficiency, capturing exhaust gases for storage or use or recovering materials from incineration ashes, provided such actions under this measure do not result in an increase of the plants’ waste processing capacity or in an extension of the lifetime of the plants; for which evidence is provided at plant level.
 4. This exclusion does not apply to actions under this measure in existing mechanical biological treatment plants, where the actions under this measure are for the purpose of increasing energy efficiency or retrofitting to recycling operations of separated waste to compost bio-waste and anaerobic digestion of bio-waste, provided such actions under this measure do not result in an increase of the plants’ waste processing capacity or in an extension of the lifetime of the plants; for which evidence is provided at plant level.
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