

Interreg EUROPEAN UNION

North-West Europe

OPIN

European Regional Development Fund



Scottish Enterprise



OCEAN POWER INNOVATION NETWORK

Innovation Support Scheme

Collaborative Innovation Groups

Guidelines for Applicants and Call for Proposals

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1 Introduction

This document sets the context for Collaborative Innovation Groups (CIGs) and explains the process for applying for support from the Ocean Power Innovation Network (OPIN).

The guidance will be updated from time to time to reflect priorities for the ocean energy sector and the OPIN project. Potential applicants should ensure they have the current version of the document (downloadable from the [OPIN website](#)).

2 About OPIN

The Ocean Power Innovation Network (OPIN) is a 3-year initiative, running from 2019 to 2021. The project has a total project budget of €2.6M, with €1.5M in financial support contributed by Interreg North West Europe from the European Research and Development Fund (ERDF).

OPIN is a cross-sectoral collaborative network that aims to accelerate the growth of the ocean energy sector and its supply chains across the partner regions of Ireland, the UK, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Germany.

The scope of the OPIN project includes:

- Wave, tidal stream, floating offshore wind and hybrid offshore renewable energy systems;
- Subsystems, components, materials, enabling technologies, installation, operations and maintenance, decommissioning, related processes and services; and
- Energy systems and storage solutions, to enable integration of ocean energy.

The basic premise of OPIN is to encourage both cross-sectoral and cross-regional collaboration for Offshore Renewable Energy SMEs. Cross-sectoral collaboration will bring already proven expertise, capabilities and products from other sectors into the ocean energy sector. This will help to reduce costs and accelerate technology development.

The Innovation Support Scheme is targeted on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the ocean energy sector and the current or potential value chain.

3 What is a CIG?

A Collaborative Innovation Group (CIG) is a small group of SMEs, often working with research entities and / or large companies, to solve specific problems which are barriers to deployment of ocean energy and offer opportunities for new products, services or markets. CIGs should focus on challenges which cannot be solved by one SME alone and aim to include complementary skills and expertise.

For the purposes of applying for OPIN support, a CIG should be led by an SME. The group may also include large companies, universities or research organisations where they can provide a specific contribution to the work and support the SMEs to achieve their objectives.

CIGs must be cross-border, involving participants from at least two OPIN regions.

CIGs are also encouraged to work on a cross-sector basis, bringing in knowledge and expertise from other sectors to help address the challenges identified.

CIGs will work on defined Collaborative Innovation Projects (CIPs).

It is envisaged that OPIN will support around 12 CIGs.

4 Ocean Energy Challenges and Opportunities

CIGs can be formed to respond to identified challenges for the ocean energy sector and its value chain. The following general challenges have been identified in published studies and roadmaps:

Technology challenges:

- Modelling, testing and demonstration
- Materials, components sub-systems and systems
- Structures, foundations and moorings
- Installation, logistics and infrastructure
- Power transmission, grid connection and integration

Economic & supply chain:

- LCoE analysis and cost reduction strategies
- Scaling and arrays
- Industry and supply chain development
- Synergies with other sectors
- Insurance and finance

Regulatory / environmental:

- Standards
- Health & safety
- Environmental impact assessment and monitoring

There is significant scope for the ocean energy sector to learn from and work with more established sectors, including other renewable energies, particularly offshore wind, utilities, oil and gas, maritime/ship building, aerospace, automotive, defence, construction, mining, chemicals and information communication technologies (ICT). These sectors can provide technology, processes and know-how to ocean energy and an opportunity to work together on common challenges, such as working in a maritime environment.

The OPIN partners, in consultation with stakeholders through annual symposia, workshops etc. may identify additional challenges and opportunities. These will be published on the OPIN website and in future CIG calls.

CIGs are invited to look at these challenges and opportunities and identify specific actions which can be taken through a CIP to address them. CIGs are not expected to work on all aspects of a general challenge; they can focus on specific issues / opportunities.

There is also scope for “bottom-up” CIGs where a group of SMEs has identified a challenge or opportunity they would like to work on which isn’t specifically mentioned in the OPIN calls.

Where two or more CIG applications are responding to the same challenge and / or suggesting similar scope of work, the OPIN partners may ask the applicants to consider working together as a single CIG. This is explained in the CIG Application Process section.

5 What is a CIG Innovation Support?

CIG support is designed to assist CIG participants to come together and work on the development and implementation of a Collaborative Innovation Project (CIP).

Support services are available up to a maximum value of **20,000 Euro per CIP**.

There will be no direct financial support to CIG members – the support will be in the form of services provided or paid for by an OPIN partner.

Each CIG will be facilitated by an OPIN partner. This will be agreed with the applicants, based on which OPIN partner is best placed, in terms of location / expertise, to provide support. It is likely that the lead will be an OPIN partner from the same region as the lead SME.

In addition, SMEs in Ireland and the Scottish Enterprise region can apply for **Travel Support**, if they require assistance with travel related to setting up a CIG or implementing a CIP.

For European State Aid purposes, support will be treated as **de minimis** aid and, unless otherwise agreed, the *de minimis aid* for CIGs will be divided equally between the undertakings (companies) involved in a CIG. Further information, including general eligibility criteria, is provided in the [OPIN Innovation Support Scheme Guidance for Applicants](#).

6 Support Available

The activities covered by CIG Innovation Support are:

- OPIN partner facilitation of the CIG (this will not normally be counted as part of the *de minimis aid*).
- Support from an OPIN technical partner for specific aspects of the project – access to expertise.
- Support from an external expert, procured by OPIN, to carry out specific task in relation to the project.
- Help to access “mainstream” support services (this will not normally be counted as part of the *de minimis aid*).

The CIG members are not required to provide any financial contribution to the OPIN provided support activities but will be responsible for ensuring that staff and other resources are provided to carry out task as identified in the Action Plan.

The work to be carried out by a CIG will depend on the challenge and anticipated outputs. The table below indicates the kind of support that may be available from OPIN. We will, as far as possible, tailor this to the needs of each CIG.

Proposals should be outlined in the [CIG Application Form](#). This should **include all the work that the CIG intends to carry out, including work that will be done by CIG members and the support which is requested through the OPIN support scheme**. Applications will be reviewed by the OPIN partners and suggestions for other activities or best use of the support scheme may be made. The details will be agreed between the CIG members and OPIN partners in a **CIP Action Plan**.

Innovation Support Services	
Category	Sample Topics (not an exhaustive list)
Development of Idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic workshop • Development of "roadmap" • Detailed specification of needs • Identification of possible solutions / solution providers • Value chain identification / development • Feasibility study
Business Planning / Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market research / analysis • Financial analysis (Cost of Energy); • Business models • Outline business plan • Development of investment / funding proposal • IPR management

Innovation Support Services	
Category	Sample Topics (not an exhaustive list)
Access to Technical Specialists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical specification of new approach / product • Advice & guidance on technology innovation • Technology assessment • Hydrodynamic analysis • Electrical engineering, grid connection • Mechanical engineering • Control system, drive train, blades • Materials • Manufacturing • Corrosion management • Joining technology (welding & bonding) • Installation • Operations and maintenance • Test campaign definition

Table 6.1: Innovation Support Services

In selecting the proposed activities for CIPs, applicants should bear in mind that other, mainstream services are available and consider how a CIP could add value to these or prepare an innovation idea to the point where more in depth support can be sought. OPIN partners can assist with this.

There are other projects which offer more in depth / later stage support for the ocean energy sector, for example:

- [Marine Energy Alliance](#): technical and commercial services
- [OceanDEMO](#): testing in real sea environment
- [MaRINET 2](#): access to marine research and testing facilities
- [Blue-GIFT](#): testing in real sea environment

7 CIG Innovation Support Eligibility Criteria

The following eligibility criteria will apply to CIG support applications.

Company eligibility:

- The lead applicant for a CIG must meet be an SME and meet the General Eligibility Criteria set out in the [OPIN Innovation Support Scheme Guidance for Applicants](#). The *de minimis* state aid associated with the CIG support will be split between the SMEs participating in the CIG, therefore each SME must meet the General Eligibility Criteria.

CIG composition:

- The lead applicant for a CIG must be an SME.
- The core membership of a CIG must involve a minimum of 2 SMEs.
- Large companies and research organisations may also be members of the CIG, as long as at least 50% of members are SMEs.
- CIGs should include members from at least 2 different OPIN regions.
- Additional members can come from countries in the North-West Europe area, as defined by the Interreg North-West Europe Programme.
- Associate members / observers from outside North West Europe may be involved with the CIG but cannot be direct beneficiaries of support. Associate members / observers can't be included in a CIG at the expense of a potential CIG member from North West Europe.
- CIGs are expected to consider cross-sector opportunities and preferably include at least one member from outside the ocean energy sector.

8 CIG Application Process

Groups of SMEs may apply for CIG support at any time. The OPIN Steering Group will make the decision on whether to support CIG applications up to 4 times per year, until closure of the scheme.

The scheme will be open until all available funding is committed or the last date on which a CIG can be approved with a realistic prospect of all eligible expenditure being incurred during the lifetime of the OPIN project.

The CIG application process is described in Figure 1.

Before applying, it is recommended that the lead SME gets in touch with its regional OPIN partner to discuss the CIG ideas and application process. This discussion will include the proposed composition of the CIG, topic to be addressed and support requested. Depending on the location of the companies and the specific services and expertise required by the CIG, the OPIN partners may make suggestions on the appropriate lead partner (in terms of location).

The next stage is to complete a [CIG Application Form](#).

The estimated value of de minimis state aid will be split between the enterprises in the CIG. Each enterprise to which de minimis aid is being offered must submit a signed [De minimis Self Declaration Form](#). SME members of the CIG must will also submit an [SME Declaration Form](#).

Documents should be submitted by email to OPIN@seai.ie.

Original documents should be sent by post to:

OPIN Project

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland,
3 Park Place
Hatch Street Upper,
Dublin 2,
Co. Dublin
D02 FX65,
Ireland

Forms must be completed in English.

Where two or more CIG applications are responding to the same challenge and / or suggesting similar scope of work, the OPIN partners may ask the applicants to consider working together as a single CIG. In this case feedback will be provided to applicants and they will have the opportunity, if amalgamation of groups is agreed, to submit a new application.

CIG applications will be evaluated by OPIN partners, using the evaluation criteria set out below.

The OPIN Steering Group will consider the evaluation reports and make the decision on which CIGs to approve. Feedback will be provided to applicants.

Once a CIG has been selected, a lead OPIN partner will be appointed to work with the CIG. This may be an OPIN partner from the same region as the lead SME or the OPIN partner with the best technical fit for the project. The lead OPIN partner will discuss the proposed activities with the CIG and an **Action Plan**, which includes supports which can be provided through the OPIN Innovation Support Scheme, will be agreed.

This Action Plan will provide the basis for the **CIP Support Offer** which will be issued to the lead SME. Signature of the offer by the lead SME will complete the **CIP Support Agreement**.

Work on the CIG will commence when all documents have been received.

9 CIG Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation and selection will be completed by the OPIN Steering Group. Where considered necessary, additional expertise may be brought in to review an application.

Evaluation of applications will be based on the following criteria:

Strength of the Scientific/Technical Approach, as evidenced by:

1. the innovativeness of the idea and the approach/concept;
2. the significance of the scientific or technical challenge, and
3. the thoroughness of the (concept) presentation.

Ability to competently carry out the project/development, as evidenced by:

1. the qualifications of the key staff, subcontractors and consultants, if any, and the level of adequacy of methods, equipment and facilities required for the design and development of the concept/approach; and
2. the soundness and level of adequacy of the development plan to show progress toward proving the feasibility of the concept.

Impact, as evidenced by:

1. the significance of the technical and/or economic benefits of the concept, if successful;
2. the likelihood that the development of the concept under investigation could lead to a marketable product or process; and

- 3. the likelihood that the concept/approach could attract development funding and/or investments.

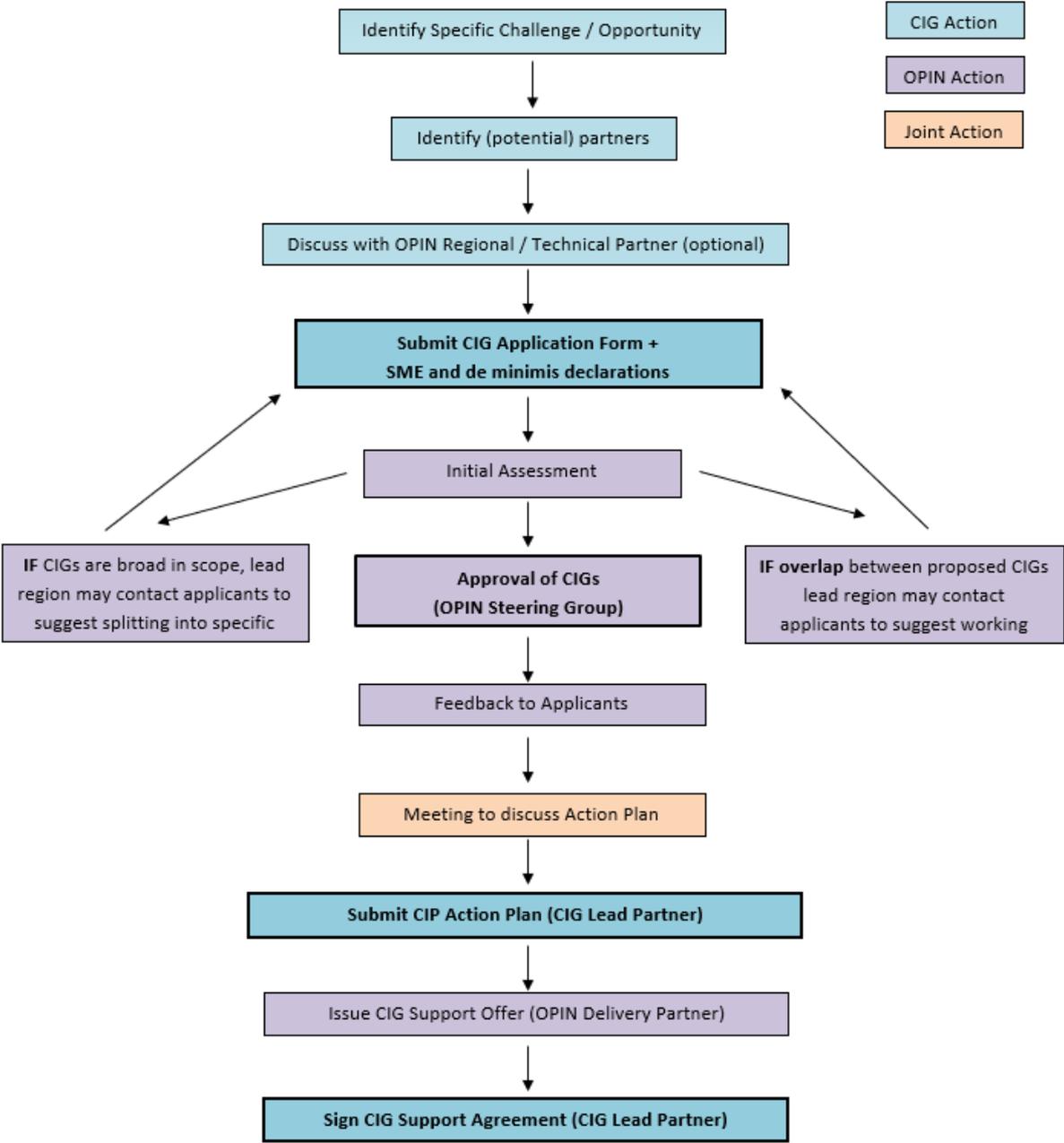


Figure 1: OPIN Collaborative Innovation Group Approval Process

10 Implementation, Reporting and Follow-Up

The OPIN lead partner and any other OPIN partners appropriate to the CIP will work with the CIG to agree an **Action Plan**, setting out the planned activities of the CIG, use of the OPIN Innovation Support Scheme and other supports which may be provided by OPIN partners or mainstream support agencies. The Action Plan will be based on the CIG Support Application, revised to reflect the eligibility of proposed activities and any comments or qualifications from the OPIN Steering Group.

Depending on the progress of the CIP and needs of the CIG members, the Action Plan may be revised during the life-time of the CIG, but the total value of support services awarded cannot exceed €20,000.

On completion of the CIP, a **CIP Final Report** will be prepared by the CIG, with input from the OPIN lead partner, describing:

- The work carried out
- The outputs / results
- Any new products developed during the project and the stage which they have reached
- Follow on actions
- Follow on support needs – for referral to mainstream support services
- Recommendations for future action

To allow OPIN to collect evidence of impact of the services provided, a further short **CIG Feedback Report** will be requested one year after completion of the CIP. The following feedback will be requested:

- How have you used the CIP Report?
 - Further refinement / development of the idea – please outline
 - Development of a new product – please outline
 - Development of a new market - please outline
 - Do not plan to take this further – explain why
- What timeframe do you envisage for commercialisation of the product?
- What barriers do you still need to overcome before commercialisation?
- What additional support might help you with commercialisation?

The information provided in these reports will be treated as confidential but will be used by OPIN partners for reporting of outputs to the Interreg North West Europe Programme.

OPIN partners will also discuss the feedback report with the CIGs to identify any appropriate mainstream support to assist with the next stage of the process and refer the SMEs to appropriate sources of assistance.

11 Publicity and Dissemination

Recipients of CIG Innovation Support will be required to assist OPIN's dissemination and knowledge transfer activities. CIG members, through the Support Agreement, will consent to a short summary of the challenge addressed and the outcomes achieved being published on the OPIN website, together with a contact person for further information. CIG members may also be asked to provide case studies or present at OPIN events. Any publications, reports, webpages or media releases directly related to a CIG supported through OPIN should acknowledge this support using the Interreg North-West Europe logo, where possible, and the following wording: "The work described here has received support from the European Regional Development Fund through the Ocean Power Innovation Network (OPIN), an Interreg North-West Europe project."