



Northern Ireland
Embrace
a giant spirit

Experience
Development
Toolkit

Northern
Ireland
**Embrace
a Giant
Spirit**

Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit



Toast the Coast, Causeway Coastal Route

Contents

Introducing the Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit experience brand	6
STEP 1: The INSPIRERS: Sharing the giant spirit of Northern Ireland	14
STEP 2: The AWAKENERS: Awakening the giant spirit in our visitors	26
STEP 3: The EXPERIENCE CRITERIA: Achieving world-class quality	32
STEP 4: Reviewing and Improving	44
Your first steps	47
Support and next steps	48

our giant promise

Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit means two things:
sharing the giant spirit of Northern Ireland
and
awakening the giant spirit in our visitors.

This Toolkit gives step-by-step guidance on creating experiences that embrace our giant spirit.

Introducing

the Northern Ireland - Embrace a Giant Spirit experience brand

The Northern Ireland- Embrace a Giant Spirit brand reflects who we are. It is based on what our visitors have fed back time and again.

Over the next ten years Northern Ireland- Embrace a Giant Spirit brand will benefit Northern Ireland by:

- Increasing our domestic and international reputation as an attractive holiday destination
- Building the number of visitors who come here
- Increasing the length of time visitors spend here
- Increasing the amount of money that our visitors spend per head
- Supporting the growth of our large, medium and small tourism businesses



Our Promise

to our visitors - Giant Spirit Experiences

Northern Ireland - Embrace a Giant Spirit is a pledge to our visitors. It promises them experiences that they recognise as distinctively Northern Irish and which communicate our giant spirit.

Living up to that promise is a challenge to us. Delivering world-class, well-designed experiences that embody the brand across Northern Ireland will require a collaborative effort from our tourism industry.

Sharing the giant spirit of Northern Ireland reflects consumer perceptions of a warm, engaging and big-hearted country. It highlights our land as one built by pioneers and entrepreneurs, with a rich cultural history, reflected in words, music and craft, and woven together by a unique, elemental beauty.

Awakening the giant spirit in our visitors reflects the aspects that we know visitors to Northern Ireland seek out. It focuses on how embracing our landscapes, culture and heritage can help people to connect, discover and feel inspired and refreshed.

This toolkit will help you develop Giant Spirit Experiences that deliver on that promise. It can be read in conjunction with the Northern Ireland - Embrace a Giant Spirit Experience Development Framework for additional detail on the brand.

The Challenge to us

The Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit brand focuses on the experiences of Northern Ireland that we offer people. It creates an opportunity for us to work together to create unforgettable visitor experiences. Bringing it to life requires us to be continuously reflective and challenging of our offering and ideas.

We will continue to find new and exciting ways to connect with, engage and surprise our visitors – to awaken their giant spirit. We know we can do this. We will do it better and faster, if we follow the experience development steps developed specifically for this brand.

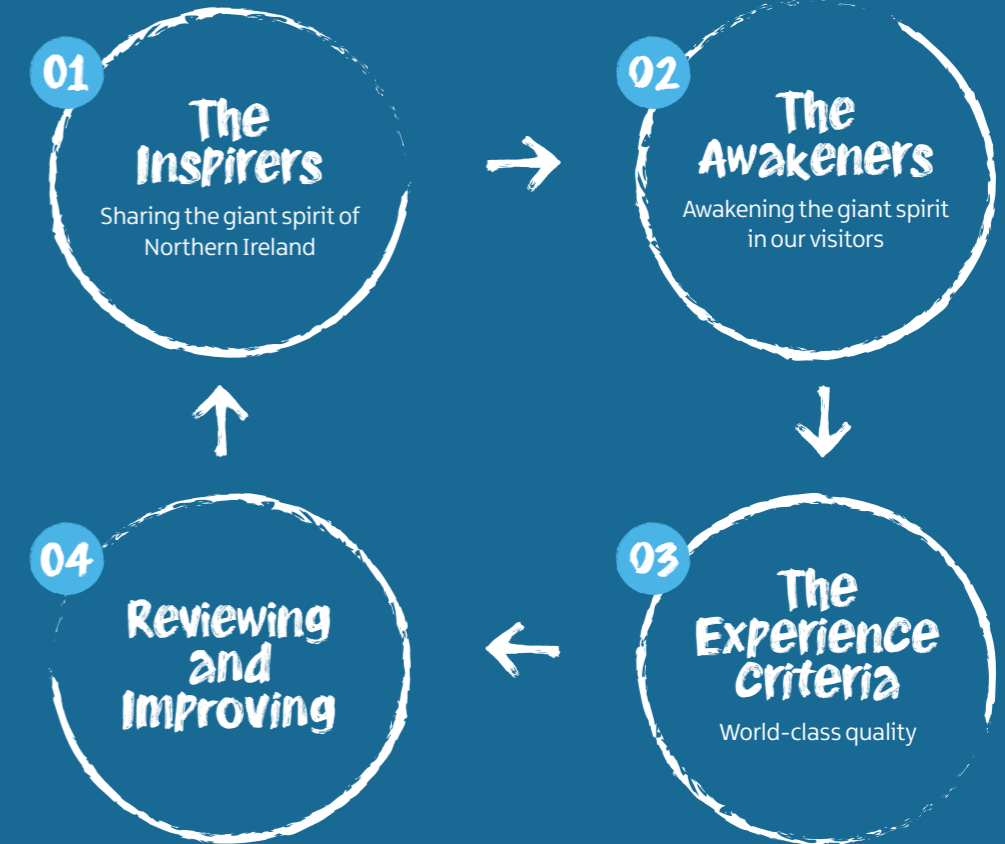
This Toolkit sets out the experience development steps that will lead to brand-aligned experiences.



The Gobbins Cliff Path, Causeway Coastal Route

Four steps to Giant Spirit Experiences

There are **four key steps** to creating Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit experiences with a bespoke tool for each step:



Begin with a pause for thought..

What has awoken your giant spirit?

Before you start thinking about the experiences you offer, it may be helpful to sit down, ideally with a team, and talk about your own holiday experiences. Think about what left a lasting impression, that in some way 'awoke a giant spirit' in you. The memories that come to you first are probably important. There are no right or wrong answers.

You might find these special memories come from chance encounters with local people, or from trying a new activity, learning a new skill, discovering an amazing place, hearing about someone's life, or simply having time to relax and refresh, or from something else entirely.

Collect a range of responses if you can.

**Memories of holiday experiences that
awoke a giant spirit in us!**

Answer:





Glide with the Tide

Taking visitors out of their comfort zones and challenging them to try something new immersed in the glorious natural environment of Strangford Lough makes for a memorable experience. Glide with the Tide includes:

- learning how to paddle a kayak
- enjoying the sense of freedom and tranquility on the water
- seeing the wildlife of the lough
- hearing about the area, local people and their way of life
- harvesting fresh mussels from the lough and cooking them on the shore.



The tranquility and serenity of the landscape was wonderful. The highlight was a seal popping up right beside my kayak – it was wonderful being so close to nature. Great to be able to slow down and take the time to simply enjoy the place.



Step 1 The inspirers

Sharing the giant spirit of Northern Ireland

The Inspirers identify the four big ideas about the giant spirit of Northern Ireland that are at the heart of the brand and that visitors should be able to find in Giant Spirit Experiences. These are the things that we want visitors to discover, think about and talk about during the experience and long after.

The Inspirers are:

- Big-hearted
- Original
- Legends and Stories
- Land, Water and Sea

Big-hearted

Original

Legends and stories

Land, water and sea

Inspirers are the first and most fundamental part of the experience design.

For more on the Inspirers look at the **Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit Experience Development Framework.**



Focus on Big-hearted - doing it better

Being Big-hearted	What we do now	New things we could do
Having warm, generous and hospitable hosts		
Meeting people who do extra and go further for you		
Receiving personal, bespoke service		
Encountering local people who show passion and share enthusiasm		
Contact with down-to-earth NI people		
Enjoying NI wit and humour		
Being invited to join in local events and activities		



Inspirer: Big-hearted

This is the most important inspirer. It should flow through every aspect of your Giant Spirit Experience. All Giant Spirit Experiences must deliver this well.

Being Big-hearted means that you put the people of Northern Ireland and their warm approach to visitors front and centre in your experience. The people your visitors meet and the stories they encounter of our people past and present should all reflect big-heartedness.

Big-hearted experiences help visitors to meet and get to know the people of Northern Ireland.



Inspirer: Original

We need Giant Spirit Experiences to be unusual and unexpected so that they stand out on a world stage.

Being Original means thinking creatively about the experience you can offer and not simply copying what others do.

Original Giant Spirit Experiences can spotlight the pioneering inventiveness of Northern Ireland's people, its contemporary creative industries and industrial heritage.

Focus on Original - doing it better

Being Original	What we do now	New things we could do
Sharing new and different experiences		
Enjoying the quirky		
Experiencing distinctive local culture		
Encountering the inventiveness of NI people		
Participating in imaginative and creative activities		
Taking a different angle		
Seeing new connections		
Being surprised by the unexpected		
Making new discoveries		
Celebrating the unique		



Focus on Legends and Stories – doing it better

Sharing Legends and Stories	What we do now	New things we could do
Discovering ancient stories of the land – myths and folklore		
Enjoying local story-telling and story-making		
Being wrapped up in newer stories and sagas – Narnia, Game of Thrones		
Hearing about NI national heroes		
Encountering local, everyday heroes		
Discovering great NI writers		
Becoming a legend		
Being moved – experiencing emotion, imagination and inspiration		



Inspirer: Legends and Stories

Well told stories touch visitors’ emotions. Giant Spirit Experiences will all contain at least one strong story of Northern Ireland that visitors will remember.

Using Legends and Stories means the experiences will draw on our great tradition of storytelling. Tell your stories well by planning carefully and focusing on character, atmosphere and drama.

Identify the key emotional touch points or dramatic moments and link them to appropriate places and/or times in the experience.

Choose a range of interpretation techniques and media to enhance the atmosphere of your story and how people engage with it.

Living with the elements – NI rural life

Discovering diverse NI landscapes

Experiencing solitude, tranquility and inspiration

Meeting producers (e.g. fishers and farmers)

Having your senses enlivened by the elements

Land, water and sea

Eating local food

Connecting with nature

Getting off the beaten track

Having outdoor adventures

Inspirer: Land, Water and Sea

Giant Spirit Experiences will connect visitors more strongly to our landscapes, seascapes and cityscapes.

Ensure your experience is 'rooted' in a specific place. Focus visitors' attention on the local environment and give direct, sensory, contact with it. This can include highlighting different scents, flavours, sounds, textures, colours and light conditions, showing people how to track and observe wildlife or to read weather prospects in sea and sky.

Experiences that reflect Land, Water and Sea can include physical challenges, 'getting away from it all', contact with wildlife and explorations of geology or architecture.

Highlight Land, Water and Sea in the food you offer visitors and showcase our excellent producers and strong traditions of food and drink.

Focus on Land, Water and Sea – doing it better



Sharing Legends and Stories	What we do now	New things we could do
Discovering diverse NI landscapes		
Connecting with nature		
Getting off the beaten track		
Having outdoor adventures		
Eating local food		
Having your senses enlivened by the elements		
Meeting producers		
Experiencing solitude, tranquility and inspiration		
Living with the elements – NI rural life		



Tracey's Farmhouse Kitchen

Tracey demonstrates big-heartedness as she opens the doors of her own home and invites visitors into her kitchen. Her carefully designed Giant Spirit Experience includes:

- sitting down together at the family table to chat and enjoy Tracey's first-class baking
- sharing family recipes and stories of bread making traditions passed down through the generations
- learning to make dough and bake your own bread on a griddle
- time to talk and laugh with local people about their families and way of life
- enjoying the fruits of your baking labours and taking some away.



Meeting and making friends with Tracey was the main element of this experience. Actually baking my own bread gave me an incredible sense of achievement. I was surprised that it was simpler than I thought it would be. The most surprising element was the texture of the dough.



Step 2 The Awakeners

Considerations that will help to deliver Awakeners

The Awakeners are a tool for developing experiences that awaken a giant spirit in your visitors. They focus on creating an emotional response to your experience and will vary from person to person.

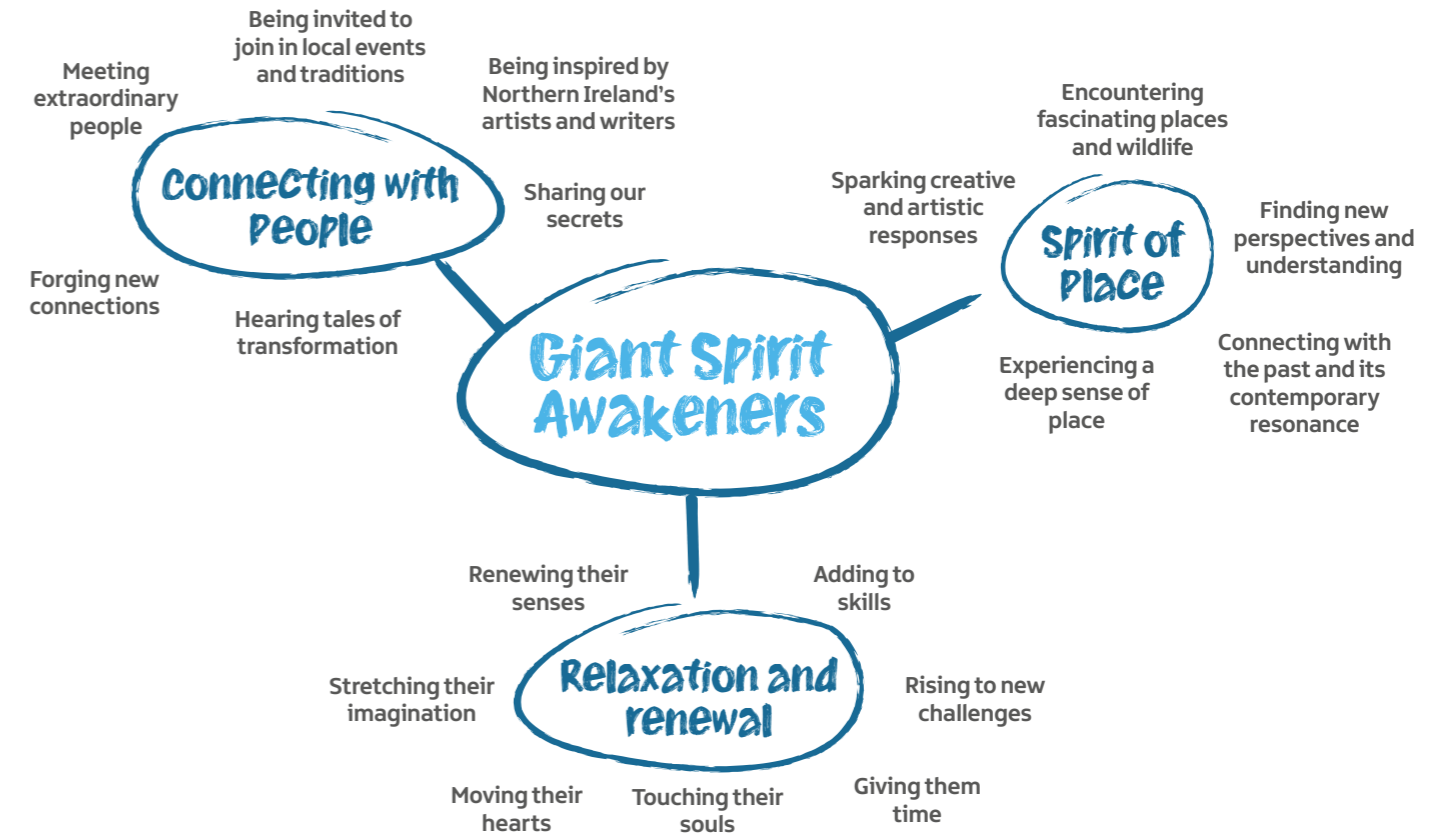
Using the Awakeners will make our brand stand out internationally and create lasting emotional connections with Northern Ireland.

Considerations that will help to deliver Awakeners:

- Try to engage all the senses, especially scents and sound
- Engage visitors in two-way conversations
- Show people things that they would have otherwise missed
- Give privileged views and 'behind the scenes' access
- Be flexible and recognise visitors as individuals
- Respect peoples' responses
- Give people time and do not rush them
- Provide something to take away after the experience

Some Giant Spirit Awakeners

These are examples of Awakeners from the providers who were part of the development of Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit. Some may fit your experience. You may wish to add others.



For more on the Awakeners look at the Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit Experience Development Framework.



Which Awakeners does your experience deliver?

Talking to and observing visitors so that you understand their responses during your experience is essential to identifying your Awakeners. You can then review the experience to make the Awakeners more available to more people.

Your planning should involve the whole team. Work together to identify how you can ensure that as many visitors as possible experience your Awakeners. Consistency of delivery is a key factor in the success of your business and of the Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit brand.

Our Awakeners	What we do now to help visitors experience them	New things we could do



Beyond the Bridge

An old fisherman's hut is an atmospheric and appropriate setting for engaging visitors with the story of the rise and fall of the local salmon fishing industry. This Giant Spirit Experience includes:

- immersing visitors in the location and bringing it to life with stories
- challenging visitors to cross the Carrick-a Rede rope-bridge to visit the cottage
- sharing stories of people of the past
- hearing the legends of the land from a local
- experiencing something of the life of the salmon fishermen – learning to tie fishing knots, lifting bags to feel the weight of the daily catch
- engaging the senses – breathing in the fresh, sea air, feeling the salt on your lips
- relating the fortunes of the local salmon fishing community to the fate of the Atlantic salmon
- finding out about contemporary life on the Causeway Coast.



The whole experience was so emotive and powerful - especially hearing about the decline in numbers of wild salmon and issues with modern salmon farming and its environmental impact.



Step 3 Experience Criteria

Achieving world-class quality

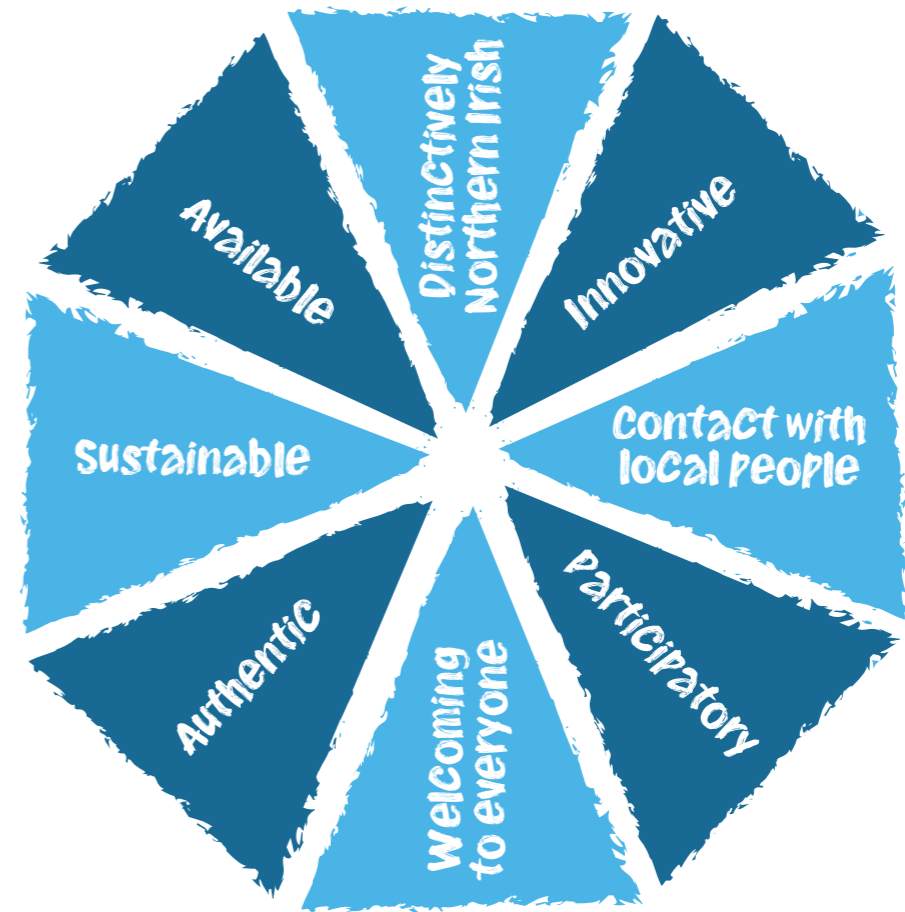
The Experience Criteria are a tool for focussing on the quality of the experience and in particular that it is appropriate for the international market.

All Giant Spirit Experiences need to meet the Experience Criteria to ensure consistent, recognisable quality across the brand.

The Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit Experience Criteria:

- Distinctively Northern Irish
- Innovative
- Contact with local people
- Participatory
- Welcoming to everyone
- Authentic
- Sustainable
- Available

The Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit Experience Criteria



There is more information on the Experience Criteria in the **Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit Experience Development Framework.**

Checklist of Experience Criteria

Use this checklist to review how your experience performs against the Experience Criteria.



EXPERIENCE CRITERION: Distinctively Northern Irish

This Experience Criterion makes the visitor aware they can only have this experience in this way in Northern Ireland. Giant Spirit Experiences showcase the people and places of Northern Ireland that make us unique. Our local stories, our characters, our heritage, our landscapes, our food, music and literature all contribute to this.

Consider whether your experience includes:

- local traditions, culture and heritage
- special aspects of Northern Ireland
- stories of local history, local people and sense of place
- stories that highlight the history of Northern Ireland
- local food and/or drink

Things we do now	New things we can do



EXPERIENCE CRITERION: Innovative

Giant Spirit Experiences should be unexpected, cutting-edge and different, so they create surprise and make a lasting impression. You can achieve this by offering novel experiences, adding unusual features, or by innovative use of digital technology.

Consider whether your experience (or elements of it):

- has been developed or refreshed in last year
- is unique in Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland and/or the UK
- includes unusual, quirky, or characterful elements
- uses digital technology to create an innovative experience
- surprises by providing more than is advertised
- involves visitors creating something

Things we do now	New things we can do

EXPERIENCE CRITERION: *Contact with local people*



Our international visitors want to get under the skin of the places they visit; meeting people is the most immediate and powerful way of doing this. Giant Spirit Experiences involve finding out about and meeting local people and discovering the Northern Ireland character.

Consider whether your experience includes:

- is designed to ensure that hosts/staff have time to talk informally with visitors
- involves meeting people with a strong connection to local communities
- includes stories of local people, past and present
- involves inviting visitors to local events and activities
- is run by staff trained in communication skills, including telling local stories and making connections with place

Things we do now	New things we can do

EXPERIENCE CRITERION: *Participatory*



Giant Spirit Experiences actively involve visitors, inviting them to join in and to be part of the action, not to just watch or listen.

Consider whether your experience (or elements of it):

- engages all the senses (not just sight and hearing)
- encourages visitors to participate in the activity
- involves visitors in two-way conversation (not just listening)
- helps visitors to learn or improve a skill or technique

Things we do now	New things we can do

EXPERIENCE CRITERION: Welcoming to everyone



Giant Spirit Experiences ensure that all our visitors feel comfortable and included, especially those who do not speak our language and do not know our culture. We do everything we can to make our experiences accessible and appropriate for all our visitors.

Consider whether your experience includes:

- offers translations for non-English speakers
- uses International English in spoken and written communication
- is accessible for people with restricted mobility or sensory impairment
- communicates any restrictions on access clearly before and during the visit
- is offered by staff who are trained in disability awareness and cultural awareness

Things we do now	New things we can do

EXPERIENCE CRITERION: Authentic



Giant Spirit Experiences show people real things in real places. They encourage people to see, touch, taste or smell, original objects, actual tools and real ingredients. They make the visitor experience as close as we can to the life of the people of Northern Ireland, past and present.

Consider whether you experience includes:

- people who can share first-hand skills or memories
- 'privileged-view' or 'behind-the-scenes' access
- good use of physical props, especially original artefacts
- telling stories in the place where they happened

Things we do now	New things we can do

EXPERIENCE CRITERION: Sustainable



Giant Spirit Experiences care for the clean, green landscape of Northern Ireland and the global environment. Environmentally conscious visitors expect this.

Giant spirit experiences will take practical measures towards environmental sustainability and will demonstrate responsible approaches. These include active management to sustain the landscape, especially in areas of considerable tourist footfall.

Giant Spirit Experiences should consider:

- their role within their wider community
- working with the local food producers to reduce food miles as far as possible
- monitoring and managing the impact of visitor footfall and behaviour, on local communities and protected landscapes
- applying green or sustainable policies and procedures

Things we do now	New things we can do

EXPERIENCE CRITERION: Available



As far as possible, Giant Spirit Experiences will be available outside the main tourism season, at weekends and in evenings

Consider whether you can:

- be flexible about when people can buy your experience
- offer it in the evenings to support the evening economy
- offer a variation of the experience outside the main season

Things we do now	New things we can do



Sheepdogs at work

Jamese invites visitors onto his farm and shows them the working life of a hill sheep-farmer. For most people this is a completely new and original opportunity.

The experience includes:

- a warm welcome from a farmer who tells you about his life, his family and his work on the farm
- A visit to the sheep sheds with the farmer to learn about the different breeds of sheep and the wool the produce
- seeing the skill of working two sheep dogs at once
- watching sheep being sheared
- getting close to the action: opening and closing the gates of the pens, feeling different types of wool, petting the lambs and helping to weigh the sheep



The skill needed to work two dogs and a flock of sheep at once was amazing! It takes so much patience and time. Having spent an afternoon with Jamese, I have a much better understanding of demands of sheep farming.



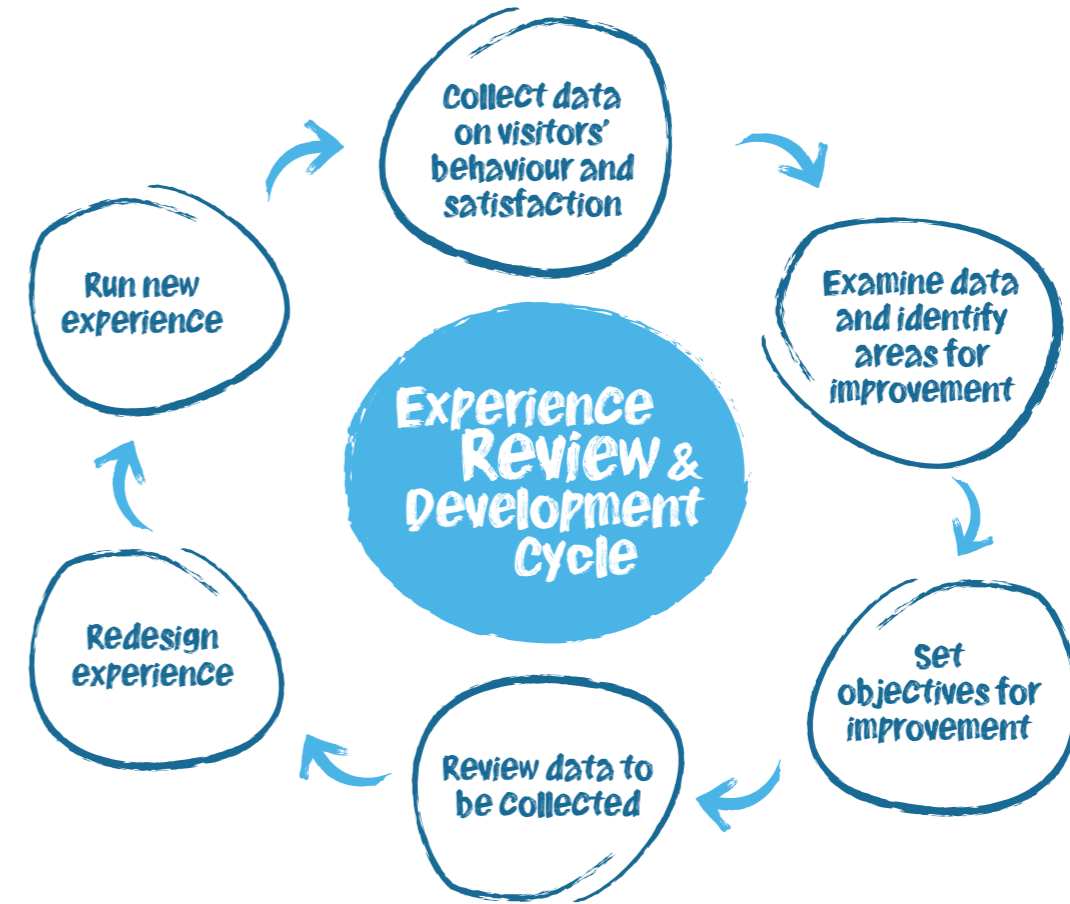


Step 4 Reviewing & Improving

Like all great experiences, Giant Spirit Experiences need to continually change and evolve.

You should review your responses to Steps 1, 2 and 3 at least annually.

Even more importantly, you need to know how your visitors are responding. Are they having the experience that you want them to? Collecting and using visitor feedback is vital to Giant Spirit Experiences.



Tips for learning from your visitors

- Watching and talking to visitors regularly is essential for understanding how they are responding to your experience. This should be embedded in the management of your site or activity
- Observing visitors can show you what they are really interested in and where they want to go
- Engaging visitors in conversation can be as valuable as a formal interview. Visitors are usually happy to help

The key questions to ask visitors are:

What were you hoping for from this experience?

What have you enjoyed most?

How do you think we could offer a better experience?

- Collect feedback from guides and all visitor-facing staff
- Ensure that the information you collect from all sources is documented

Reviewing the success of your Giant Spirit Experience



What data do you collect on visitors' satisfaction and behaviour?	What data could you collect?
What does this data tell you about what is going well?	What does this data tell you about what could be improved?
How often do you use the collected data to review and amend the experience you offer?	Are you happy with this frequency?

your first steps



Now that you have gone through the process, you can start developing your Giant Spirit Experience. Focus on the most important and achievable changes in the short and medium term.

Look back at the possibilities you highlighted in each of the steps and identify changes you could make to your experience in the short or medium term. Be realistic in terms of your human, time and financial resources.

Priority actions to take	When we can start it
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Sharing the
giant spirit of
Northern Ireland

Awakening the
giant spirit
in our visitors

For more information on any aspect of Northern Ireland - Embrace a Giant Spirit contact:

Tourism Northern Ireland

Floors 10-12, Linum Chambers
Bedford Square, Bedford Street
Belfast, BT2 7ES

Tel: +44 (0) 28 9023 1221

Email: experiencedevelopment@tourismni.com

Every care has been taken to ensure accuracy in the compilation of this brochure.
Tourism NI cannot accept responsibility for omissions or errors but these will be
rectified in future publications when brought to our attention.



**tourism
northernireland**

