

NEOEN Community Benefit Fund 2025

Grants Criteria

About NEOEN and Community Foundation Ireland

NEOEN is a multinational solar energy company, headquartered in France and with an office in Ireland. NEOEN has established three solar farms at different sites in Leinster: Hilltown, Co. Meath, Hortland, Co. Kildare and Millvale, Co. Wicklow. To support the communities around each of these sites, NEOEN has created a Community Benefit Fund. This fund will be administered in partnership with Community Foundation Ireland, which has 25 years’ experience in helping donors make strategic, sustainable and impactful grants.

About the Community Benefit Funds

The NEOEN Community Benefit Fund seeks to invest in the social, cultural, and environmental development of communities local to NEOEN’s solar farm sites, particularly by addressing social inclusion, accessibility, and community development. The fund will run for approximately 15 years. In 2025, eligible organisations may apply for grants of €1,000 to €5,000.

Your project must take place within 10km of one of the three solar farms. Click below to view their locations on GoogleMaps. Note that the solar farms are of different sizes, and the amount available for funding to each community will depend on the energy generation of each site in any given year, which may vary.

| Solar Farm Location | Strand Name |
|--|----------------|
| Hilltown Solar Farm, Co. Meath | NEOEN Hilltown |
| Hortland Solar Farm, Co. Kildare | NEOEN Hortland |
| Millvale Solar Farm, Co. Wicklow | NEOEN Millvale |

Priority area: Please note that while projects must take place within 10km, if the grant round is over-subscribed, preference will be given to projects operating within 5km of the solar farm.

Timeline

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Opening Date for applications: | Tuesday 4 th February 2025 |
| Closing Date for applications: | Friday 7 th March 2025 at 5pm |
| Grants will be awarded: | Mid-late April 2025 |
| Work should begin: | May 2025 |
| Progress Report due | November 2025 |
| Outcome Report due | May 2026 |

Priority Areas

The Community Benefit Fund is subject to rules laid down by the Irish Renewable Energy Support Scheme. 40% of available funds will be ringfenced for projects that align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 4, 7, 11 and 13. Goal 4 seeks to help children receive a better education. Goal 7 relates to clean energy – an option here might be installing solar panels on a community building. Goals 11 and 13 promote sustainability and climate action – projects here might be improving local green spaces or developing a biodiversity plan for your area.

Alongside these obligations, we have identified [Social Inclusion and Accessibility](#) and [Community Development](#) as priority areas. Note also that this is a flexible fund which is keen to address local needs and support community initiatives. If your project is eligible, it will be considered. Below are examples of projects that could be funded. The list is by no means exhaustive, its purpose is to give applicants some direction. If you are unsure of your eligibility, contact us to discuss your project before submitting your application.

Social Inclusion and Accessibility projects

- Staffing hours for projects that are targeted toward people with disabilities or other vulnerable or socially excluded groups.
- Projects from not-for-profit groups partnering with sporting organisations to create participation opportunities for people with accessibility challenges and/or older people.
- Equipment to allow remote participation in activities for housebound community members.
- Transport initiatives that improve accessibility for older people and others without cars.
- Meeting spaces to combat social isolation and promote arts, culture, and heritage.
- Support for migrants and refugees.

Community Development Projects

- Programmes or activities aimed at creating intergenerational connection in the community.
- Spaces or activities for younger people beyond sporting activities.
- Citizen scientist projects related to local community biodiversity action plans.
- Retrofitting projects run by local Sustainable Energy Communities.
- Projects that enhance a community’s assets, e.g. green spaces, heritage structures, roads and footpaths. Note that this type of project is eligible only where the applicant has ownership of, or written permission to use, the land/space in question. Proof of ownership/permission will be required before a grant is awarded, including planning permission where relevant. There are no exceptions to this requirement.

Eligibility

| Eligible organisations must... | Eligible projects must... |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a registered charity or a formalised local community/voluntary group • Have an annual income above €2,000 and below €100,000. Schools may apply even if their income is above this. Also note that income to pay CE workers is not included here. • Be at least one year old • Be situated or primarily active within 10km of the relevant solar farm • Have up to date and sufficient governing documents, annual accounts, a dedicated bank account and safeguarding policies where relevant • Prove ability to provide reports on a funded project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate alignment with the key focus areas of the Fund (Social Inclusion and Accessibility, Community Development), <u>and/or</u> Sustainable Development Goals 4, 7, 11, and 13). • Demonstrate impact on communities within 10km of the relevant solar farm • Request between €1,000 and €5,000, however no more than 50% of the organisation’s annual income. • May be new <i>or</i> ongoing programmes • May include overhead costs where they are necessary for the success of the project • May be joint projects where one entity is the lead applicant |

| Ineligible organisations include... | Ineligible projects include... |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups operating outside the 10km catchment area • Groups with annual income below €2,000 or above €100,000 • Statutory bodies • Profit-making enterprises • Animal welfare groups • Proposals from individuals • Sporting organisations* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing core costs such as insurance, rent, bills etc. • Religious or political activities • Projects that have already happened or any activities that will happen before the grants are awarded • Projects delivering services outside the 10km catchment area • Projects where the requested funds would replace existing statutory funding • Projects with budget requests below €1,000 or above €5,000 |

*While sporting organisations *may* apply, there must be a charitable purpose to the project or activity, as per the priority areas. Please contact us before applying if you are unsure about your eligibility.

Community Benefit Fund Committee

The Community Benefit Fund Committee was established in summer 2024 and has helped to identify the priority areas and the eligibility criteria, to develop the application guidelines, and to approve the framework that will be used to assess applications (below). Assessments will be carried out in the first instance by Community Foundation Ireland, who will then present their recommendations to the committee, the members of which are:

| | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Developer | NEOEN | Cliona Gormley / Antoine Oudin |
| Chair | Community Foundation Ireland | Melanie Steinhardt |
| Community Advisor | Kildare Partnership | Karl Duffy |
| Community Advisor | Meath Partnership | Colin Ludlow |
| Community Advisor | Wicklow Partnership | Brian Carty |
| Secretary | Community Foundation Ireland | Hugh Harkin |

Community Advisors will provide their expertise and input to support the selection of successful applicants, but decision-making will rest with Community Foundation Ireland and NEOEN. Please note that lobbying of committee members may result in the exclusion of your project.

Assessment Framework

To ensure that the process is fair and transparent, and that each project is assessed on its own merits, assessors will use a scoring system, on a scale of 1-10, guided by the questions outlined below. Only high-scoring applicants in the first four categories will be put forward to the committee. If there is a tie, applications will be graded on the fifth category, Additional Factors.

Fit With Criteria

- Do the organisation and project fit neatly with the criteria?
- Does the project align with one or more of the priority areas?
- Will the work/activities be carried out within 10km of the relevant solar farm?
- Has the group's correct governance information been submitted?

Evidenced Need

- Is there is a clear community need for the work/activity?
- Is this need corroborated by evidence?
- Are the beneficiaries among those identified in our priority areas?
- Does the project demonstrate clearly how it will address this need?

Budget, Financial Capacity and Governance

- Has the budget been fully thought through? Is it detailed and realistic?
- Has the applicant sought value for money in costing their project, and is this evidenced?
- Have quotations been submitted with the application where relevant?
- Does the organisation show capacity to manage the grant, is there a track record?
- Is there a plan for the sustainability of the project beyond the lifetime of the grant?

Impact

- Do the intended outcomes fit neatly with the impact the Fund seeks to have?
- Is the project timeline clear and realistic, with measurable objectives?
- Will there be a strong impact on the intended beneficiaries and the wider community?
- Will the project bolster community cohesion, capacity, and/or organisation?

Additional factors

- Does project work take place within 5km of the solar farm?
- Is the project innovative, bringing a new approach to the community?
- Is this a fruitful collaboration/consortium between one or more groups?
- Do project beneficiaries have a say in project design and implementation?
- Will the project effect meaningful long-lasting change?
- Can the organisation leverage our grant to secure funds elsewhere, i.e. match funding?

Reporting requirements

Successful grantees will be required to submit two reports: an update after six months and a final report at project-end. These dates will be detailed in your grant agreement. Failure to submit reports will result in your organisation becoming ineligible for further funding, and in some cases, may result in Community Foundation Ireland requesting the return of funds granted.

How to apply

The Community Benefit Fund is open for applications on Tuesday 4th February and will automatically close for applications at 5pm on Friday 7th March. To apply, you must first register your organisation on the Community Foundation Ireland portal here:

https://communityfoundation.smartsimple.ie/s_Login.jsp. If you have not registered before, please read the [Application Help Guide](#). For any additional questions, please review the [FAQ document](#) before contacting us.

Governance documents

Community Foundation Ireland performs checks on all applicants to ensure we operate within compliance and legal guidelines. As detailed in the Application Help Guide, all organisations must upload digital copies of the following governance documents before the application deadline:

- A constitution or similar. If you don't have an official constitution, a mission statement signed by two committee members is sufficient.
- A bank statement where the account name matches the organisation. We don't need to see transactions, just the "header" of the statement that shows the account name, account number, sort code and IBAN.
- Your most recent annual accounts, signed by two committee members. If you don't have annual accounts, a Profit and Loss statement for the previous year, signed by two committee members, is sufficient.
- A list of your current trustees/committee members, with dates of appointment.

Contact us

Should you have any questions or require support in submitting your application or governing documents, please contact us at info@foundation.ie. Please include "NEOEN" in the subject line to help us direct your query to the correct place. Due to the high number of enquiries, we may not be able to respond to queries immediately.