

Community Energy Fund – Stage 2 Guidance

This Community Energy Fund (CEF) guidance provides an overview of the fund and its purpose, as well as providing specific guidance on questions in the Stage 2 form.

Please note that Stage 2 grants are for Type A projects only (community energy assets).

Stage 2 grants are not available for Type B projects (community energy efficiency or advice). Stage 1 funding should be sufficient to prepare this type of project to seek investment or private grant funding.

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Overview

The Community Energy Fund (CEF) is a £10m grant scheme for urban and rural communities to develop community energy projects, including local renewable and low carbon energy projects (such as wind farms, hydro power and rural heat networks), community electric vehicle projects (such as electric vehicle charging points and electric car clubs) and energy efficiency retrofit and advice projects (where there is local need and a gap in existing services and where there is a business model for a sustainable service).

The CEF funds are for community-based organisations, which are developing projects for the benefit of the local community. Funding is for the development of projects from concept to investable scheme, including the launching approaches to community fund raising. It cannot provide capital funding for the installation of projects themselves.

To be eligible to apply to the CEF, applications must be from eligible organisations and projects proposals should ensure at least 50% community ownership and must benefit the local community in their final project.

The aims of the fund are to:

1. Increase the level of community and locally owned renewable and low carbon energy assets to make progress towards the Government's net-zero carbon emissions targets.
2. Support communities by helping them to reduce energy costs or generate income through community owned energy assets, reinvesting income locally, or services to reduce energy demand.
3. Promote growth through the creation of jobs and volunteering opportunities in the communities where projects are located.

The fund will achieve its aims by removing barriers to investment that are currently preventing the development of community-scale projects.

Projects are encouraged to demonstrate that they will look at identifying opportunities that consider:

- **Innovation:** as defined by Energy Systems Catapult, to innovate net zero through “new technologies, new ways of deploying existing technologies, new business models, new consumer offerings, and new policy, regulation and market design,” e.g., using new combinations of technologies to optimise the value of the project.
- **Ambition:** to capitalise the scheme commercially to leverage private investment (from a commercial partner or from the community itself).
- **Share learnings:** to share learnings on process and outputs such as legal documents with other communities across the region. Peer-to-peer mentoring will be supported by the Local Net Zero Hubs (‘the Hubs’). The cost of sharing learning can be covered through the Stage 1 grant. Grant recipients for Stage 2 must agree to share their learnings and should cover this cost internally.

We are seeking well-informed project concepts that are community-led and for community benefit, and of a sufficient scale to generate impact and value for money.

What we can support

CEF grants are not available for capital works, equipment or service delivery, and cannot be used to cover costs incurred prior to the grant offer.

Please note that the amount of funding available to you is subject to subsidy control, (see section in guidance below).

Stage 1 – up to £40,000 grant funding

Stage 1 grants are available to scope project feasibility (financial, practical and legal), including further community consultation and consultancy costs for the development of a feasibility report, to establish project viability, to establish a landowner Heads of Terms, and to identify and eliminate risks such as planning permission and grid connection.

Please refer to the ‘Community Energy Fund – Stage 1 Guidance’ for details.

Stage 2 – up to £100,000 grant funding

Before applying:

- Applicants must already be incorporated as an eligible type of organisation.

- You must have undertaken some community engagement demonstrating local support for your proposal.
- You must have completed professional feasibility scoping to cover, as a minimum, all sections of the CEF Feasibility Study Template and be able to provide a comprehensive written report(s) with findings. (Feasibility work undertaken by the applicant is acceptable, providing it is of professional standard.) **This evidence must demonstrate that your project is technically feasible.**
- You should have received formal advice from your Local Planning Authority about your project concept. **This evidence must demonstrate that your project has a good chance of securing planning permission.**
- You should already have secured a minimum of three quotes for the work for which you are seeking funding, or explain why this is not possible.

If you are not yet at this stage, please consider applying to Stage 1.

Stage 2 grants can pay for professional support to make the project investment ready and/or construction ready, including:

- Detailed technical feasibility assessment
- Landowner agreement for lease or land purchase
- Surveys and professional support in development of a planning application
- Additional community engagement
- Additional public body stakeholder engagement
- Planning applications
- Permits, licences and consents applications
- Development of a robust business case to attract sufficient investment
- Project management

All Stage 2 grant recipients are expected to participate in peer-to-peer learning at their own expense. A programme of shared learning will be developed during delivery, dependent on the types of projects that are funded. Requirements will be reasonable and proportionate, understanding that applicants may be volunteer-led and/or have limited resources.

By the end of Stage 2 grant delivery:

The CEF Stage 2 grant aim is to fund development costs to financial close, i.e. when the finance for the capital construction is finalised and available to the project. Where this is not possible (e.g. due to the scale of the project), projects are expected to demonstrate that sufficient funding can be accessed to complete the pre-construction development of the project and get to financial close.

As a minimum for Stage 2, projects should have obtained planning permission (or have completed the planning process) and have a viable financial model and secured grid connection (as applicable) in place on completion of grant funded activities. If the applicant intends to set up a new body to meet CEF community ownership requirements, you must have laid the ground for this by the end of the grant period – with Articles of Association and a Shareholders Agreement (if relevant) written and agreed.

Applicant eligibility

Applications must be led by legally constituted voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations in England only. Eligible incorporations types are as follows:

- Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
- Community Benefit Society (CBS or Bencom)
- Community Interest Company (CIC)
- Co-operative Society
- Development Trust
- Pre-commencement society
- Registered charity (including eligible faith groups, sports clubs, etc.)
- Registered provider of social housing (this can include local authority or social landlord owned social housing)
- Registered Society
- Town or Parish Council

Community ownership

Any project(s) developed through CEF funding should be designed to be at least 50% community-owned. Applicants do not need to be community-owned at the point of application, but if you are not community-owned then you may need to establish a new eligible incorporated body at a later point that can comply with these requirements.

For this fund, 'community ownership' should ensure that people living locally to the project have the opportunity to influence decisions about the asset's management and/or distribution of benefits – for example, via an accessible membership that gives them voting rights. Ownership models should ensure that a reasonable share of 'community benefit' flows to the local community. However, investment in the project may be raised from the wider community, such as through a national share offer, and benefits can also accrue to those other parties (i.e. through interest payments on their shares). The case for community ownership and community benefit will be assessed on a project-by-project basis based on evidence submitted in the application.

Applications from partnerships

Partnerships are welcome, but you must specify a lead partner. CEF funds can be passed from the lead partner to supporting partners specified in your application without competitive tender, providing partners are themselves eligible to apply and that an agreement reflecting the CEF funding terms is established between the lead partner and supporting partners prior to any funds being transferred.

Partnerships with non-eligible organisations are permitted, and good partnerships can help improve your score. However, it is not permissible to pass CEF funds to non-eligible organisations except through competitive tender or as part of fees payable to public bodies to acquire necessary licencing and permissions.

Applications from local authorities

Local authorities cannot receive CEF funding for their own costs in any circumstances (except Town or Parish Councils) other than formally required fees (e.g. for planning

applications). However, they can lead an application if they are applying in their capacity as a Registered Social Landlord for a social housing-based project, and they can be a supporting partner to an eligible organisation leading an application for any other eligible project. Although the local authority cannot claim their own costs in these circumstances, they can add value to a bid by coordinating work or providing other support or advice.

Applications from schools

Applications cannot be accepted directly from schools. However, a community group can apply for project infrastructure on school sites. For example, the community surrounding a school may form a community group in order to progress a project on their school site, or an existing community group could do this.

Applicants undertaking their own feasibility work

Applicants can undertake and charge to complete their own feasibility work, provided the group can provide assurance that they are competent and have the skills and expertise to do this. Day rates must align with or be less than the going market rate, and that the offer should be comparable with what professional consultants could provide.

Applicants not based in the proposed project locality

Applications from organisations located in a different geographical area from that of the infrastructure or project to be developed can be considered for CEF on a case-by-case basis if they can demonstrate:

- Support of the community where the infrastructure will be located, and
- Income and benefits generated will flow to the community where the infrastructure will be located.

In these cases, we will look for a clear structure which would ensure the community would benefit from the project and are supportive.

Applicants who have already received Stage 1 and Stage 2 funding

Additional Stage 1 or Stage 2 applications can be accepted on a case-by-case basis if it is clear that the remit of the project has expanded; for example, the applicant wants to add a battery, and this requires additional Stage 1 funding to work out the feasibility of this, or this requires additional Stage 2 funding to apply for the planning permission for this.

Additional applications should not be for additional funds where the original work wasn't carried out well, such as additional Stage 1 funding to improve a feasibility study which was of low quality. However, it is permissible to apply for funds to revise good quality feasibility studies undertaken prior to CEF that require updating before the project can move forwards.

If a group is expanding the remit of a site which has already received funding, the funds they receive should be capped at £40,000 for Stage 1 and £100,000 for Stage 2. Value for money will be considered when looking at applications for expansion, checking whether the additional funding is proportional, and the investment is worthwhile.

A community group that has already received funding may apply again for a different project on a different site. These new projects would be eligible for the full Stage 1 and Stage 2 support, providing any relevant subsidy control requirements are met (see below).

Project eligibility

CEF Stage 2 can support **community energy asset projects** (such as renewable or low carbon energy, electric vehicles). The following technologies are eligible for funding:

- Anaerobic digestion
- Biogas heat network
- Bio liquids/gas/fuels
- Biomass heat network
- Electric vehicle infrastructure (publicly available, incorporating generation/storage)
- Heat pumps
- Heat pump-fed heat networks (e.g., heat zoning for a village)
- Hydropower
- Solar (photo voltaic)
- Solar (thermal)
- Wind power
- Battery storage

Technologies NOT on this list will be considered on a case-by-case basis and you should contact South West Net Zero Hub for advice before applying. These might include bundled work e.g. energy efficiency, grid services, building management systems or demand management.

Assessment process

The application form indicates **pass/fail** questions and questions that are **scored**. All other questions are not scored but must be completed. This guidance document explains what we are looking for against each scored question.

Proposals that do not meet essential criteria around eligibility and subsidy control cannot be funded and will not be fully assessed. This is a competitive process and we cannot guarantee that all eligible applications will be funded.

Applications will be initially assessed by your local Hub, beginning with a high-level check to ensure basic eligibility and completeness. If eligible, your application will then be assessed against our marking matrix alongside due diligence checks.

If your application is complex or requires further information, a decision may be delayed. If your application is incomplete or if you do not respond to requests for information in a timely manner, your application may not be put forward for recommendation.

Following Hub level assessment, your application will then be appraised by the Hub's review panel which will include a representative from the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero, who will make recommendations based on their expertise.

The highest scoring and most recommended projects will then be presented to the Hub's Board for a funding decision with final sign-off by West of England Combined Authority as the Hub's Accountable Body.

Depending on the volume of applications received and the need to seek clarification of information, South West Net Zero Hub may choose to present applications to the review panel and Hub Board in several rounds to ensure that ready-to-go applications are not delayed while we await information for others.

Funding will be awarded at the discretion of the Hub and its Accountable Body and is subject to the availability of funds and the terms of the offer.

We want projects to succeed. You are encouraged to work with your local Hub for any advice or support needed to develop your application. In some cases, panels may approve applications with conditions, to avoid needing to go through rejection and reapplication if the proposal is nearly acceptable. Projects that are not approved are encouraged to revise their application based on feedback and to resubmit.

Audit requirement

An audit report will be required both at the end of the financial year (March) and at the end of the project. The audits must be conducted and signed for by auditors who are qualified and members of recognised accountancy institutions including CIPFA, ICAEW, ACCA, ACA, CIMA. Up to £2000 of grant funds per audit/year can be allocated within your grant request to pay for this.

Payment of grant

Payment of grant to successful applicants will be made in arrears upon provision of a valid claim with evidence of defrayed project costs. An initial advance payment can be made at the start of the project to applicant organisations where this is necessary to enable projects to start. Advance payments will be for up to a maximum of £10,000 and will be approved on a case by case basis.

Timescales

Please keep an eye on your local Hub's website, or sign up to its mailing list, for any deadlines and further rounds.

www.swnetzerohub.org.uk/what-we-do/community-energy

Contact

All enquiries about CEF should be directed to your local Hub:

South West Net Zero Hub: communityenergy@westofengland-ca.gov.uk

Submitting your application

Completed applications should be emailed to communityenergy@westofengland-ca.gov.uk.

You will receive confirmation of the receipt of your application via email within 24 hours of submission.

Stage 2 Form Guidance

The guidance below covers the scored questions, and any other questions where some clarification might assist completion.

If you applied for a Stage 1 grant, it is acceptable to reuse text from that form. However, please ensure it is up-to-date and reflects any changes to the questions where Stage 2 requirements differ from Stage 1.

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Checklist

Please refer to the relevant sections of the guidance below for information on eligibility and subsidy control.

There are five Local Net Zero Hubs (“Hubs”) across England. You should apply to the Hub where your project will be delivered, and check the application deadlines on their website:

- [Greater South East Net Zero Hub](#) (including London)
- [Midlands Net Zero Hub](#)
- [North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub](#)
- [North West Net Zero Hub](#)
- [South West Net Zero Hub](#)

Section 1: Project Overview

1.4 Location

A map is only needed if it will help us to understand your project location – such as projects not located at a single site – or the boundaries of the local area that will benefit.

Describe the project location in your own words, such as the name of the village or neighbourhood where the project will take place.

Point-data on the project location (postcode, latitude and longitude) should indicate where the planned asset(s) will be located.

Latitude and longitude can be found by right-clicking a location on Google Maps. The format should be (for example): 51.49888, -0.13055

Section 2: Applicant Details

2.3 Organisation type (pass/fail)

You cannot apply to CEF if your organisation does not fall into one of these categories.

If you are not eligible, you could consider becoming incorporated as an eligible organisation, or partnering with an eligible organisation who can lead your application.

Registered providers of social housing can include local authority or social landlord owned social housing.

2.5 Skills and experience (scored)

We are looking for evidence that your organisation or partnership involves people with sufficient skills and experience to lead your proposed project.

High scoring proposals will demonstrate experienced in developing similar energy projects. You can still score well with transferrable skills and experience from other types of activity, but please ensure the relevance is clear.

2.6 Governance (scored)

We are looking for evidence that your organisation has a sustainable governance model with limited risk, i.e. avoiding reliance on a very small number of key decision-makers.

CEF aims to support community-owned projects. Your organisation does not have to be community-owned to be eligible, but applicants whose governance incorporates community ownership at application stage will score higher.

2.7 Directors or Trustees (pass/fail)

This question will be assessed as part of due diligence.

2.8 Financial management (scored)

We are looking for reassurance that your organisation is in good financial health.

2.9 Partners (scored)

We are looking for reassurance that you are working with appropriate partners who will bring added value to your project.

Recognising that not all projects need partners, projects without partners will automatically score 3 out of 4.

Section 3: Feasibility

3.1 Technology type (pass/fail)

If you are proposing an alternative technology under 'Other', we will consider this on a case-by-case basis and you should contact your local Hub for advice before applying.

Please note that electric vehicle charging projects will only be considered if they incorporate renewable or low carbon electricity generation and storage.

3.2 Scale (scored)

The scale of eligible projects will vary according to technology type, but in general terms we expect projects to:

- Require planning permission and significant pre-planning development
- Generate sufficient energy to power multiple buildings; this can be used literally to power multiple buildings, or to power other community energy assets (such as electric vehicle charging points) or can be exported (wholly or partly) to the grid.

At Stage 2, we expect you to have a clearer idea of scale from your feasibility report and be able to explain how this has been calculated.

3.3 Technical feasibility consultant (scored)

We are seeking reassurance that your technical report was completed by an appropriate consultant.

3.4 Technical feasibility (scored)

Your feasibility report will be the main evidence used in scoring this question. We will look at demonstrable feasibility as the key marking point, but you will also be scored on the quality and completeness of the report, which must cover all of the elements within the CEF Feasibility Study Template. If you cannot provide this, consider applying to Stage 1.

3.5 Innovation (scored)

We are seeking evidence of innovation as defined by Energy Systems Catapult, to innovate net zero through “new technologies, new ways of deploying existing technologies, new business models, new consumer offerings, and new policy, regulation and market design,” e.g. using new combinations of technologies to optimise the value of the project.

Innovation is not required, but innovative projects will score extra points here.

3.7 Owner engagement (scored)

At Stage 2, you are expected to already have a Heads of Terms in place when applying. By 'Heads of Terms' we mean a written agreement signed by the landowner stating that they are in principle committed to supporting the project's progress, preferably (though not

required) with an exclusivity agreement ensuring project findings will not be used to pursue a private arrangement.

3.8 Consents and permits (scored)

You do not need have to secured any consents or permits at this stage, but we want to see that you understand what is required for your chosen technology, drawing from your feasibility report.

3.9 Planning permission (scored)

We do not expect Stage 2 projects to have planning permission yet, but you should have obtained written advice about your project from the relevant Local Planning Authority.

Section 4: Community

4.1 Community definition (scored)

We are looking for reassurance that you are working to a definition of ‘local community’ that aligns with our own, i.e. a defined geographical community within the vicinity of your proposed asset or service. We are not quantifying a fixed definition of “local” as this will depend on the nature of your project and local characteristics (such as urban or rural contexts), and you should suggest what you consider to be an appropriate area.

4.2 Community relationship (scored)

Applications will score higher from organisations that are place-based by their nature, and are working in the locality of their proposed asset or service or can otherwise demonstrate an existing relationship with the local community.

4.3 Asset or project ownership (scored)

The final asset or service must be at least 50% community-owned. Projects that exceed this minimum requirement will score higher, as well as projects that consider inclusivity across the community as part of their ownership model. See ‘[Applicant eligibility](#)’ section above for our definition of ‘community ownership’.

If you intend to establish a new incorporated body to manage the project, please give details of your intentions or options under consideration and explain how this will meet the community ownership requirement. You must have laid the ground for this by the end of the grant period – with Articles of Association and a Shareholders Agreement (if relevant) written and agreed.

4.4 Community engagement (scored)

At Stage 2, we expect projects to have already completed robust community engagement as part of your project feasibility work, and have evidence that the project has a good level of support, particularly among people living in the vicinity of the planned asset(s). Projects should engage with residents and businesses in the project area and with potential customers, if applicable.

Depending on technology, where required and in line with current planning guidelines, properties should be notified in writing with details about the project and feedback collated.

We are also looking for robust plans to engage with the community throughout the remainder of the process, taking into account plans for inclusivity across the community and responsiveness to feedback.

4.5 Community benefit and investment model (scored)

Please refer to the aims of CEF at the start of this document. We want to hear details of expected benefits and how these will be shared within the local community. Higher scores will go to projects with an inclusive approach to sharing benefits or targeting of benefits towards disadvantaged local people, and projects that keep a high proportion of overall project benefits within the local community.

At Stage 2, we expect to see clear and explicit information on the investment model, and how revenues generated by the installation will be spent or invested. If a community benefit fund is proposed, then we want details of how and where this will be distributed, what the scope of benefit is and how it will be administered.

Section 5: Finance

5.3 Why CEF funding is required (scored)

We are looking for evidence that you have adequately explored alternative funding towards your development costs. You do not need to have secured other funding to score well if you have a good justification as to why this has not been possible.

5.4 Business model (scored)

We want to understand your expectations about how your project will function and achieve success, to ensure you are being realistic and have considered influencing factors.

5.5 Finance plan (scored)

We are looking for evidence that you have realistic ideas about project costs, income streams and funding – estimates and ranges are acceptable for most answers. You should already have firm quotes for the activities for which you are requesting a Stage 2 grant.

Your costs should be exclusive of VAT, unless it is irrecoverable. VAT can make a big difference to costings, so be sure you understand whether your suppliers are charging you VAT or not in their quotes, and whether or not you can recover this VAT.

5.6 Grant request (scored)

We will assess your answer for eligibility and value for money, based on your procurement process outcomes and our wider understanding of typical costs within the sector.

‘Other’ costs will be considered on a case-by-case basis, to ensure we do not automatically rule out legitimate costs that have not been considered in our own list.

‘Other’ costs must relate directly to the purpose of CEF Stage 2, i.e. to bring your project to a point of investment-readiness or construction-readiness.

You must include costs for two independent audits in your grant request, (one at the end of the financial year and one at the end of the project). Up to £2000 of grant funds can be used to pay for this service.

If you believe an advanced payment will be necessary to enable you to start your project, please let us know this.

5.7 Capital investment strategy (scored)

Although your Stage 2 grant may help you work out the details of your investment strategy, we expect you to have a reasonable idea at this stage of how you expect this to proceed and be able to outline your intended approach.

Section 6: Project Management

6.1 Project manager (scored)

We are looking for reassurance that you have an appropriately skilled project manager(s) in place, or robust, realistic plans to obtain one.

6.2 Project plan (scored)

CEF Stage 2 grants must be spent within 12 months of confirmation of funding. Please construct your plan based on the assumption that successful proposals will have this in place within two months of proposal submission. (Project plans may be refiled later if grant awards are unexpectedly delayed.)

We are looking for evidence that you have a realistic timeframe for completing the work detailed in your proposal, covering all tasks for which you have requested funding.

6.3 Project completion (scored)

We want reassurance that you have adequate plans to bring your project to completion. These should tie in with your previous answers about your financial and business model, and continue from where your Gantt chart in Q6.2 ends.

6.4 Risk assessment (max 40 words per box) (scored)

We are looking for reassurance that you understand the risks and challenges facing your project and have considered how these might be met. Please complete the table with regard to your whole project from development to build completion and/or service commencement.

Questions you might want to consider, depending on your project type:

- Does my core project team have the time and skills to see this through? Are enough people involved to avoid burnout or project failure if a key person has to step back?
- Do our proposed partners and consultants have a good track record? Are they reliable?
- Is our proposed technology or project model proven and reliable?
- Are there likely to be problems with grid connection, or other permits and consents?
- Are there any planning designations that could cause problems with obtaining planning permission, such as built or natural heritage status?
- Have we taken steps to properly understand need in the community?
- Is the project likely to generate opposition within the local community? How might we avoid this, or tackle it if it arises?

- How reliable are our financial estimates for income and expenditure, and what might affect these?

Projects will score higher if they show good understanding of a broad range of risks, and have considered how these are relevant to your particular circumstances.

6.5 Monitoring and evaluation (max 300 words) (scored)

We are looking for evidence that you will keep your project on track and learn from issues or from feedback – from both the community and other stakeholders. A case study is mandatory to help the Hubs and DESNZ learn from CEF; requirements for this will be reasonable and proportionate to any grant awarded.

Section 7: Compliance

7.1 Procurement (scored)

Projects will score highly for if their procurement approach is well-scoped and has secured at least three quotes for each activity for which you are seeking a CEF Stage 1 grant. Self-award of funding is permissible, but will score lower and must be justified.

Projects that make no attempt to comply with these requirements will fail. Projects that have not complied, but have given a good explanation as to why not, can still pass.

7.2 Procurement selection (scored)

We are looking for evidence that suppliers chosen are suitably skilled and reasonably priced. You do not have to choose the cheapest quote if you can justify your choice, but we are looking for value for money.

7.3 Subsidy control (pass/fail)

We cannot consider projects that do not comply with subsidy control.

The Community Energy Fund grant is offered as a subsidy as defined in Chapter 2, Clause 36(1) of the UK Subsidy Control Act (2022). The grant is referred to as 'Minimal Financial Assistance' (MFA).

There is a maximum amount of funding that a company/organisation can receive as MFA, measured over the last three consecutive financial years. For these purposes, we mean the period from 1 April to 31 March in the relevant years. We need to make sure that if we fund your company/organisation, it will not lead to these limits being broken. The limit is £315,000 across certain types of funding; further details about these are provided in Appendix A of your application form.

7.4 Declaration and data protection (pass/fail)

We cannot consider proposals if the applicant does not agree to the terms of the declaration.

Section 8: Additional Information

8.1 Shared learning (pass/fail)

At Stage 2, project applicants will be required to participate in shared learning activities. This helps to make best use of CEF funds for wider development of community energy projects in England. We will not consider projects that are unwilling to participate.

Appendices

Please remember to insert your organisation name and registration number **in the Subsidy Control declaration paragraph (highlighted in yellow).**

Electronic signatures are acceptable – please do not provide hard copies, and there is no need to print, sign and scan.