
Bullstown Solar Farm Community Benefit Fund Guidelines 2026



**BULLSTOWN
SOLAR FARM**

**SECAD Partnership
Community Benefit Funds**

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About Bullstown Solar Farm

Bullstown Solar Farm is located approximately 3km south of Ashbourne, Co. Meath. The project is an 8.4MW solar energy development, connected to the electricity network at 38kV and occupying approximately 50 acres. As a Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS-2) project, Bullstown Solar Farm will generate clean, renewable energy while also delivering long-term benefits to the local community.

The operation of Bullstown Solar Farm will provide a number of important local benefits, including:

- The payment of commercial rates to Meath County Council, supporting the delivery of local services and infrastructure.
- The establishment of a dedicated Community Benefit Fund, which will commence within the first year of operation. The fund will be developed in partnership with the local community to ensure it responds to local priorities and delivers meaningful, lasting benefits.

Under the Government's RESS-2 framework, Bullstown Solar Farm is required to establish and maintain a Community Benefit Fund that will operate in accordance with national guidelines. Key features of the fund include:

- **Mandatory Contribution:** A minimum contribution of **€2 per MWh** of electricity generated.
- **15-Year Commitment:** The fund will operate for **15 years**, even if the project subsequently exits the RESS scheme.
- **National Registration:** The fund will be registered on the **SEAI Community Benefit Fund National Register**.
- **Support for Sustainable Communities:** At least **40% of annual funding** must be allocated to local projects that contribute to the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)**.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Administrative costs are capped at **10% of the fund value**, ensuring the majority of funding reaches community projects.
- **Transparent Governance:** Annual reporting on fund activities and expenditure will be provided to SEAI in accordance with the **RESS Community Benefit Fund Rulebook**.

The Bullstown Solar Farm Community Benefit Fund represents a significant opportunity to invest in local initiatives, strengthen community resilience, and support sustainable development across the area for many years to come.

ESB's Community Benefit Strategy:

“To deliver long term benefits to the Communities surrounding our renewable energy projects aligning with our commitment to fostering sustainable energy solutions and supporting local communities.”

Who are SECAD Partnership

With over 25 years of experience in administering Community Benefit Funds, SECAD Partnership collaborates with communities to develop impactful projects that benefit everyone living near renewable energy sites.

About the Community Benefit Funds

The Community Benefit Funds were established with the intention of ensuring that the communities neighboring the solar farms can receive support for positive local initiatives and activities. The Community Benefit Funds seek to address current and emerging issues, needs and opportunities within communities, enriching lives and creating brighter possibilities for local residents.

Please keep a copy of these guidelines to hand when completing your application, if you need help or guidance at any stage, please contact SECAD at +353 (0)21 4613432 / info@secad.ie.

Further information and Application Form is also available on our information website <https://www.communitybenefitfunds.ie/bullstown-solar-farm-community-benefit-fund/>

Applying to the Community Benefit Funds

Prior to making an application it is essential that you read this document, which sets out general grant making criteria, and in particular the eligibility criteria for the Community Benefit Funds.

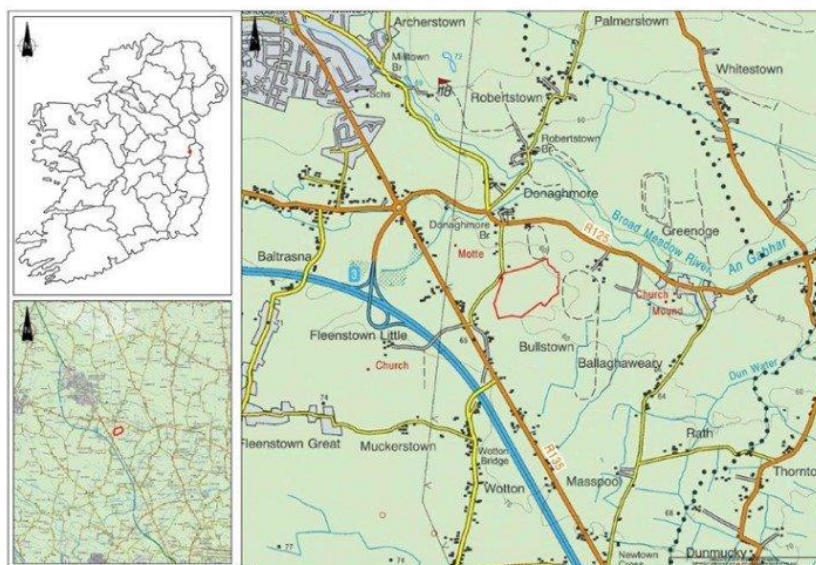
Successful applicants may not be awarded the full amount applied for and instead may be awarded a percentage of their application amount. Applicants are therefore requested to seek a percentage of their total funding requirement from other sources i.e. public funding, savings, borrowings etc. This demonstrates community involvement and commitment to projects.

Please ensure you have considered this before submitting your application and have examined how you may fund a shortfall if you are not awarded the full amount on your application.

Area of Benefit

The fund will prioritise applications from local community groups and organisations from within the **2 km area of benefit** and located close to the solar farm.

Applications from outside 2 km area of benefit will only be considered if their project directly addresses a current or prospective need/issue/opportunity relating to the communities nearest the solar farms.



Bullstown Solar Farm Map

What the fund can support

Typically, the fund is available to community and voluntary organisations for projects which are based within the **2 km** area of benefit of a particular solar farm. A maximum of one application can be submitted from each group/organisation per annum.

The fund supports projects and activities which clearly benefit at least one or more of the following categories:

- **Longterm and legacy projects:** Projects that will have a lasting and enduring impact on communities nearest the solar farms.
- **Education and skills:** In particular, those that encourage STEAM-Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Maths learning in the community.
- **Tackling Climate Change:** Projects that support environment, energy efficiency and habitat/biodiversity conservation projects
- **Social Inclusion and Wellness:** Projects that support both physical and mental health, recreation, safety and wellbeing.
- **Sustainable Communities:** Projects that enhance the capacity of the population to achieve sustainability and self-sufficiency.
- **Culture and Heritage:** Projects that support history, heritage and culture.

We encourage groups to use awards from the Community Benefit Funds to function as **Match Funding or Leverage** to be used in conjunction and/or complement other sources of funding received for your project, such as LEADER, local authority or various types of EU funding.



Bullstown Solar Farm Overview

State Aid

It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure they are not in breach of State Aid regulations, in accordance with the Rulebook for Community Benefit Funds under RESS, taking into consideration the cumulative value of all grants received by the applicant from different institutions. The current limit is €300,000 over a three-year period. For information on State Aid regulations please visit gov.ie/eu-state-aid-rules. Applicants will be asked to declare that they are not in breach of State Aid Regulations.

How to make an application

Go to the application portal at

<https://www.communitybenefitfunds.ie/bullstown-solar-farm-community-benefit-fund/>

You will be asked to submit the following documents with your application, at a minimum:

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- **A copy of your organisation's bank, online bank, credit union/post office account, statement.**
 - **A copy of your organisation's signed and dated constitution** (a template is available on request from SECAD). Please note, at a minimum a constitution should include confirmation that:
 - the organisation has charitable purposes
 - is not for profit in nature; and that
 - no directors or trustees are remunerated.
 - **Quotations are required** to verify the value of each item that you are seeking funding support from the Community Benefit Funds to purchase – dated within three months, as follows:
 - If any individual item is less than €5,000, you need one quote for that item.
 - If any individual item costs €5,000 or more, you must provide three quotes from three different suppliers, or evidence that you tried to obtain three quotes.
 - **For works relating to renovation/construction/refurbishment/groundworks/installation etc,** the following is required:
 - **A lease or letter of permission** from the owner of land on which your project is, or is to be, located to undertake any proposed works is required if the applicant group is not the owner of the premises/location
 - Planning permission, or a letter of exemption/email from the relevant Local Authority
 - **If your project includes construction, renovation, installation, groundworks** you must provide either evidence of planning permission, or a letter of exemption/email from your local authority.

It is important to note that it is the responsibility of the applicant group to provide the relevant permissions. Further information on the planning process and contact details for local authorities are available at the links below:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/PLANNING/LEAFLETS/PLANNING-LEAFLETS>

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/administration/local-authorities/local-authorities>

Operational Costs

The 2026 Community Benefit Funds will accept applications for operational costs, subject to the conditions outlined below:

- Properties will be required to have a [BER rating](#) if applying for heating costs. Please note, it is advised that buildings with a low energy rating should apply for remedial works first and should link with the Sustainable Energy Association Ireland (SEAI).
- Similarly, where an application is for lighting costs, any required energy efficiency upgrades or works should be undertaken prior to making an application for running costs.
- Confirmation there are no major structural defects, i.e., roof/wall/door are intact and sound, glass in windows etc.
- Repairs must be completed before operational application will be considered.

Please note: projects approved for funding will be required to complete an energy audit prior to contract offer. This audit can be conducted by the funder(s), or by the applicant. It is a condition of the award of any funding from the Community Benefit Funds that groups applying for operational costs must consult with SECAD prior to applying.

Schools

If a school wishes to apply to the Community Benefit Funds, they must demonstrate that their project **would not normally** be funded by the Department of Education and Skills. If in doubt, please contact SECAD.

Please note that due to the presence of public grant initiatives, applications relating to the purchase of IT equipment for National Schools will not be considered as eligible applications to the Community Benefit Funds.

The Community Benefit Funds welcome applications from schools on the following themes:

- Eco-education projects including environmental and biodiversity;
- Creativity and the performing arts, including art, heritage, music, literature and culture;
- Community amenities accessible to the broader public; or
- Initiatives that encourage outdoor education, for example, edible gardens, outdoor classrooms, wildflower meadows.

The Community Benefit Funds cannot support projects/activities, if one or more of the following apply:

- Projects operated by individuals/private sector or for-profit organisations.
- Projects which primarily benefit organisations that apply restrictive 'members only' conditions to access.
- Projects where work commenced prior to application, however separate stages of an overall project can apply.
- Projects which directly replace statutory activities/funding.
- Projects which provide unnecessary duplicate activities/services/infrastructure within the community.
- Projects which do not directly benefit the local community and are not deemed as 'not-for-profit.'
- Projects where duplicate funding from other sources exists, however match funding is welcomed.
- Projects which conflict with or adversely affect the aim, objectives or policy of energy generators or any other associated companies.
- Projects which directly promote or advance:
 - any particular religion or faith;
 - any particular political party; or
 - any type of hunting or shooting.
- Projects which seek to purchase/cover the cost of the following:
 - Recoverable VAT costs.
 - Insurance.

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- This fund will not support the purchase of equipment powered by fossil fuels, including diesel or petrol. Only zero-emission or renewable energy-powered equipment will be considered eligible for funding.

Additionally, the fund does not normally support:

- **Statutory or other accountable bodies (including schools):** unless they can provide evidence that the project is community-led, open accessible and for the benefit of the community and not a statutory responsibility.
- **VAT:** please note, if your organisation is VAT registered, no claim for payment may be made for the VAT element of expenditure.

Project Plan & Budget

It is important to take some time to think through your community project, and to consider carefully what costs should be included in your project budget. It essential to note that payment cannot be made until the project is complete and the goods are in hand or services have been completed.

Common Pitfalls

- Incomplete applications
- Poor project description
- Did not read the criteria
- Blank answers to questions
- Missing paperwork
- Project costs do not tally with quotes
- The projects falls outside the 'area of benefit'

If undertaking construction/electrical works of any nature, please be aware that an engineer's report, RECI certification, installation report or ROSPA report in the case of playgrounds, will be required at claim stage. The costs associated with procuring this report may be included in your application (please ensure a quotation is provided).

Take some time to consider the project you wish to submit for support and plan so that you will have the required documentation available to submit before the closing date.



The Global Goals for Sustainable Development

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015.

The SDGs address the global challenges we face and cover social, environmental and economic development issues such as poverty, education, inequality, climate, water and food crises. They provide a focus for how businesses, governments and civil society can tackle these challenges in order to promote a more sustainable future for all.

We ask in your application to identify which goal your group/project most closely aligns with.

Please visit this website for further information on each goal.

<https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie/>

Once you submitted your application

You will receive an e-mail to confirm receipt of your application with a copy of your application form in an attached PDF document, which may be printed for your records. SECAD will then make checks to ensure the applicant organisation and project meet the Community Benefit Funds' eligibility criteria. Complete, eligible projects will proceed to evaluation stage.

In some cases, an application may be deferred, SECAD may then request additional information to be provided in order that your application can be reconsidered during a subsequent call.

Application Evaluation Process

The decision to award funding in response to an application depends on the Community Benefit Fund under which the application was submitted. A recommendation for the award is generally made by SECAD to the funder(s). Please note the decision of the Community Benefit Funds is final. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application no later than early September 2026.

Please note, canvassing or lobbying of panel members or funder(s) will result in automatic disqualification.

Evaluation Criteria

Each application received by a Community Benefit Fund will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

Evaluation Criteria	
Project Location	Proximity of project/beneficiaries to the solar farm. Is the project located within the 2 km area of benefit or in a 'service centre' (e.g. a neighbouring town or village) outside the area of benefit, but that is used by the people living within the target area?

Demonstration of the need and potential impact of this project on the people and communities who live within the target area	Applicants should demonstrate that the project is addressing an expressed need within their community. An understanding of the benefits of the proposed project is also required. The relevance of the project to the communities within the area of benefit is considered, both at a local and strategic level.
Project Life-Span /Appropriate project timelines & costs	Project life span refers to the anticipated longevity of a proposed project. In the case of festivals/events, the scoring may be informed by anticipated impact, in addition to history of the group. Applicants should show that their project will be completed within 12 months of receiving a signed contract offer. Applications should also demonstrate that the project is: • fully costed, • well-organised, and represents good value for money, including estimated number of users on weekly/monthly basis
Contribution to thematic objectives of the Fund	The Community Benefit Funds aim to support projects and initiatives that will benefit the area surrounding solar farm. Priority will be given to projects that bring socio-economic benefit to the area including investment in large strategic projects in the appropriate service centres. The Fund can be used as matching finance for other grants.

Please note applicants that do not submit required documentation with the application form e.g. planning permission, planning exemption or owner permission, may not proceed to evaluation.

Groups which have not been supported by the funds in the last two years, may be prioritised for support.

Feedback

Throughout SECAD's grant-making policy and specific fund/programme criteria, care is taken to assess all applications against criteria in a consistent and equitable way. Although decisions are final, SECAD can provide feedback on unsuccessful applications, if requested to info@secad.ie.

Contract Offer

Successful applicants will receive a provisional grant offer and contract via an online electronic signature platform, which must be accepted, signed and returned within 15 working days.

Please note the provisional grant offer email may stipulate conditions which will need to be fulfilled within the 15-day timeframe.

Along with the contract, successful applicants will receive the relevant grant claim log in details and guidance notes relating to the drawdown of funds.

Please note, no expenditure in relation to grant aided elements of the project should be incurred until the signed contract has been received by the applicant group.

Project closing dates

All contracts contain a closing date after which time your grant offer will lapse and cease to be payable, generally this is 12 months from date of issue.

If, for some reason, your project has become delayed and will not be completed by the closing date, **please contact SECAD immediately.**

Grant Claims Process

On completion of the approved project, each applicant group will be required to upload the required documents, to demonstrate that project expenditure was undertaken. **Grants are paid retrospectively; providing evidence that the project set out in the contract is completed.**

Please remember that for funding to be paid out, you must submit all the necessary documentation required.

In order to issue your '**claim for payment**' please log back into the portal: <https://www.communitybenefitfunds.ie/bullstown-solar-farm-community-benefit-fund/> using your original login details. Then select the 'CLAIM' button for your contract year.

At a minimum you must answer the questions asked and upload the following:

- A copy of your invoice/receipt;
 - Pictures of your project/purchase; and
 - If the project spend exceeds €3,000, a copy of your groups bank statement showing the transaction/s.
 - For payments over €10,000 both you and your suppliers must supply Tax Clearance Certificate information, which is a Tax Reference and Tax Access Numbers. These are required to verify your Tax status.
- Further details are available [here](#) on how to apply to Revenue

SECAD advises that cash payments by or on behalf of applicants are minimised to no more than €200 or avoided.

In the event a group does not complete the project in full accordance with the contract, SECAD Partnership may not make the final payment and may seek reimbursement of the initial funding provided to the group.

Please note that if documentation is missing or incomplete, this will delay processing of your claim.

When processing your grant payment SECAD Partnership will make the payment to the name of the group or company stated in the Letter of Offer/Contract. Funds will be paid via EFT to the account details provided for your application.

Project Monitoring

SECAD and funder(s) reserve the right to undertake a monitoring visit to any of the funded applicants.

Case Studies and Testimonials

The last section of the claim form asks for a testimonial from the applicant group and a picture suitable for future publication.

This is for use in future reports and/or case studies, please ensure you have the permission of everyone photographed before submitting an image and in the case of minors, parental/guardian permission.

Payment Structure

There are two different payment structures which will be detailed on your contract, should you receive an offer of funding.

At any stage in the process if you need to discuss your group's individual needs, please contact SECAD.

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Payment Type	Description	In order to qualify	Projects which will not be considered for this payment type	Payment Schedule
60% up-front Payment on commencement of the contract	To assist community groups, successful groups receive an advance payment of 60% of the award value, once the contract has been signed by both the applicant and SECAD. Generally, for equipment and some services purchase.	To qualify for advance payments, projects must fulfil the following qualifying criteria: • Purchase of goods, services and equipment only; and Maximum contract value of €6,000	• Projects which include construction / renovation / installation or landscaping works • Projects where any permissions are required, including but not limited to planning permission, owner permission, heritage / conservation officer etc	Once the contract has been agreed and signed by both parties, SECAD will transfer 60% of the contract amount to the group / organisation bank account nominated by the applicant. The final 40% payment will be made in line with 'issuing your Claim for Payment'

				outlined earlier
100% Payment Retrospectively	Payment is issued to the applicant group on completion of the project and on submission of a claim for payment	All projects are eligible for this payment structure	All projects are eligible for this payment structure	100% of the contract value is paid on completion of the project and in line with 'issuing your Claim for Payment' outlined earlier. Once a claim for payment has been received and documents approved, SECAD will transfer 100% of the contract amount to the group / organisation bank account

				nominated by the applicant.
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Contact Information

Please contact SECAD if you have any questions:

Telephone: 021 4613 432

E-mail: info@secad.ie

<https://www.communitybenefitfunds.ie/bullstown-solar-farm-community-benefit-fund/>

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