



Community Climate Action Programme

Briefing Note and Guidelines for Applicants

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The Community Climate Action Programme has been developed by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) to support small and large, rural and urban communities to take climate action at a local level. Under the Community Climate Action Programme, €60m from the Climate Action Fund is being invested in localised community climate action projects and initiatives, and capacity building over the next three years. Donegal County Council (DCC) will administer Strand 1 and Strand 1a of this Programme for communities in Donegal.

Donegal County Council is due to adopt its Climate Action Plan 2024 -2029 in February 2024 which outlines how the Council will address the current and future impacts of climate change on its residents, visitors, businesses, workers, and the County as whole. The Plan supports the National Climate Objective committing Ireland to be a climate resilient and climate neutral economy by no later than 2050. Our transition to a climate neutral economy will impact on all of us. For Ireland and Donegal to make this transition, we need to work together to address how we power our buildings, work, travel, consume goods and services, and manage our waste.

This guide has been prepared for groups in Donegal to learn more about the Community Climate Action Programme and it may be subject to change. Groups are advised to contact the Community Climate Action Officer to discuss the Programme.

1. Objectives of the Community Climate Action Programme

The overall objective of this Programme is to support and empower communities, in partnership with their local authorities, to shape and build low carbon, sustainable communities in a coherent way to contribute to national climate and energy targets. This programme supports direct engagement with communities to both promote and assist in the scale up of community climate action from the respective starting points of the communities.

2. Overview of Strand 1 and Strand 1a

Strand 1 - Action: Building Low Carbon Communities

Donegal County Council have been given an allocation of **€699,000** for projects under **Strand 1**. Under this strand communities will carry out projects that have a direct climate action impact.

A number of projects will be selected from across the county which demonstrate the delivery of national climate action at local level in Donegal.

Strand 1a – Shared Island Community Climate Action

This strand enables communities to carry out a cross-border direct climate action project in partnership with a community/organisation in Northern Ireland.

Unlike Strand 1, Local Authorities have not been automatically allocated funding under Strand 1a. Donegal communities can apply and their project must have a clear North/South basis, with a cross-border partnership approach and impact.

Projects from both strands must meet the objectives of the Programme as set out in project eligibility below and be completed within 18 months from the letter of offer.

100% funding is available for projects. Projects can include a suite of measures, not just one specific action.

This Programme is an opportunity for groups to take a holistic approach in making their community less carbon intensive and more sustainable for the future. The Programme is open to a range of community groups – from those new to climate action to those with more experience.

3. Eligible Communities

Community groups are required to self-certify that they do not have the funding available to undertake the work without support, **OR** alternatively that the support will enable them to undertake more work which they otherwise would not be able to afford. Groups must be able to demonstrate their ability to carry out the proposed works.

Communities eligible for Strand 1

To be eligible to apply under Strand 1, community organisations must:

- be a not-for-profit organisation
- be located in County Donegal
- be registered with the PPN **or** connected with other collectives such as the Wheel, Tidy Towns **and /or** a community group with Articles of Association or a Constitution, which hold an AGM, and for which approved minutes are available.

The following types of organisations are **not** eligible to apply for Strand 1:

- Private individuals
- Commercial undertakings (including sole traders)
- Schools, third levels institutions etc.
- National community and environmental organisations
- Financial institutions

Communities eligible for Strand 1a (Shared Island Project)

To be eligible to apply under Strand 1a, lead organisations must:

- be a not-for-profit organisation.
- be located in County Donegal.
- be registered with a PPN **or** connected with other collectives such as the Wheel, Tidy Towns **and /or** a community group with Articles of Association or a Constitution, which hold an AGM, and for which approved minutes are available.
- have at least one partner organisation in Northern Ireland.

Given the scope for all-island projects, national community and environmental organisations are eligible to apply under Strand 1a.

Partner organisations must be either a:

- not-for-profit organisation
- Local Authority
- local/ national community and environmental organisation registered in Northern Ireland

The following types of organisations are **not** eligible to apply for Strand 1a:

- Private individuals
- Commercial undertakings (including sole traders)
- Schools, third levels institutions etc.
- Financial institutions

4. Eligible Projects

Projects must:

- Meet the overall objective, **“To shape and build low carbon, sustainable communities in a coherent way to contribute to national climate and energy targets.”**
- Address one or more of the five Programme Themes and national climate action targets, as set out below.
- Comply with all statutory requirements in relation to planning, building regulations, Health and Safety, and Fire Codes etc., if applicable

National Climate Action Targets

Apart from the Programme themes, projects should seek to demonstrate the following delivery of national climate action at a local level for Strand 1 and on a cross-border basis on the island of Ireland for Strand 1a:

- a) Reducing or supporting the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions
- b) Increasing the production, or use, of renewable energy
- c) Improving energy efficiency
- d) Increasing climate resilience
- e) Identifying nature-based projects that enhance biodiversity and seek to reduce, or increase the removal of, greenhouse gas emissions or support climate resilience in the State
- f) Assisting regions in the State (including communities in those regions) and within sectors of the economy impacted by the transition to a low carbon economy
- g) Involving potentially innovative solutions to address the above asks.

Five Programme Themes

Projects will address the following themes:


- Theme 1: Community Energy
- Theme 2: Travel
- Theme 3: Food and waste
- Theme 4: Shopping and recycling
- Theme 5: Local climate and environmental action

Projects can address one, all or some of the five themes. However, communities should try to incorporate as many themes as possible.


Below is a breakdown of each theme and some suggested projects. These are only examples and communities are encouraged to be as innovative as possible with their projects.

Groups should also consider how their projects contribute to progress in relation to relevant [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) .

Theme 1: Community Energy

<p>Many Irish buildings have very low energy ratings and high running costs, mainly due to heat loss. How we build, heat and run our buildings can play a big part in reducing Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>Heat loss accounts for 10% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. We can make our buildings more energy efficient by retrofitting them (e.g. insulation), switching off and using low energy lights/ appliances, and using smart controls.</p> <p>Potentially relevant UN SDGs:</p> 	<p>We are interested in projects which would reduce the climate impact of buildings in communities by using less energy, utilising renewable energy and avoiding heat loss.</p> <p>Project examples include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• small community renewable energy projects (solar, hydro, wind)• retrofitting community buildings• LED community lighting
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Theme 2: Travel

<p>Transport accounts for approximately 20% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. Changing our means of travel is not simple and is often dictated by previous planning and housing choices, particularly in rural communities. How we travel is one of the main areas where behaviour change can have a rapid and real impact on achieving our climate goals.</p> <p>Potentially relevant UN SDGs:</p> 	<p>Projects of interest under this theme would contribute to a reduction in travel related emissions.</p> <p>Project examples include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reduction in carbon footprint in services• improving access to cycle/ walkways• cycle parking• community EV charging point(s)
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Theme 3: Food and Waste

Growing, processing and transporting food requires large amounts of energy and materials. It is estimated that one third of the food we grow is wasted and accounts for 10% of global emissions. There is a national commitment to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030.

While being mindful that different situations such as the culture, religion, health, abilities and tastes can affect the decisions individual people can make; at a systems, community and lifestyle level there are opportunities to connect and engage people in action on food, waste and climate change.

Potentially relevant UN SDGs:



We are interested in projects that reduce food waste, promote locally grown/sourced food and food security.

Project examples include but are not limited to:

- community gardens
- allotments
- food markets
- community composting facilities

Theme 4: Shopping and Recycling

What we buy has a major contribution to emissions in terms of how they are made, transported, used, reused and recycled.

Ireland is moving towards creating a circular economy - making products that last longer, can be repurposed, reused and eventually recycled more easily. One of our climate goals is to increase the amount of waste that is recycled and to make all packaging reusable or recyclable by 2030.

As shoppers we have the power to influence how our products are made and to look for sustainable options. People are changing their shopping habits by buying products that last longer or repurposing items such as clothing and furniture. People are also planning what they will do with things when they are finished using them, recycling as much as possible, actively segregating their waste for collection and using recycling centres and services near to them.

Potentially relevant UN SDGs:



Projects of interest under this theme would increase the variety and number of recycling facilities in the local community and initiatives aimed at reducing, reusing and recycling.

Project examples include but are not limited to:

- community repair hubs
- swap shops
- toy/ sport reusable kits
- water filling stations
- single use plastics elimination in the community

Theme 5: Local climate and environmental action

Ireland has an abundance of natural resources, from our bogs and forests to our rivers and oceans. These natural resources need to be protected from climate change, and in return, they will help us by absorbing carbon, reducing the risk of flooding, increasing plants and wildlife (biodiversity) and acting as places for us all to reconnect with nature. How local communities come together to take action is an important part of the Climate Action Plan, with some of the best ideas for environmental action beginning in our local communities.

Community climate action can take many forms from simple clean-ups to community schemes, to making plans to adapt to the changes already happening.

Potentially relevant UN SDGs:



Projects of interest under this theme would take a holistic approach to managing the local environment, including in relation to climate action.

Project examples include but are not limited to:

- mini forests
- forest schools
- dispersed orchards
- community gardens
- pollinator projects
- water harvesting
- climate resilience projects

Project locations

Where a project will be delivered from a site/building/floor space that is not in the ownership of Donegal County Council, it must be in the ownership of the organisation applying to the fund, or either party must have a minimum five-year lease or agreement in place from date of the final project payment, making it available to the community.

Purchase or leasing of land cannot be the entirety of the proposed project; a minimum of a five year lease is required from completion of the project. The project would have to demonstrate how it meets the objective and criteria of the Community Climate Action Programme. Purchase or lease of land alone would not meet the programme objectives.

Donegal County Council will seek assurance through the application forms from each partner organisation that it has all required planning and regulatory permissions and consents and has secured the necessary authorisations and/or rights of access to all required land, buildings and property for all associated work required for each project delivery.

Additional note for projects eligible under Strand 1a

While projects seeking funding under Strand 1a should address the same five themes and targets as Strand 1 projects, there are also specific areas that may be particularly suited to a cross border approach. In recognition of the integration of climate and biodiversity action policies, these could include - valuing networks for nature; sustainable farming; just transition; peatland restoration; renewable energy; flood forecasting; or coastal erosion.

5. Funding/ Grant Sizes

Funding is available for 100% of the project costs. There are three project sizes:

Small Scale Projects (Up to €20,000)

Medium Scale Projects (€20,000 to €50,000)

Large Scale Projects (€51,000 to €100,00)

Eligible Costs

The Programme will cover principally capital costs. Below is a guide to the eligible and ineligible costs for projects. Eligible costs will be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, the following general conditions will apply:

Eligible Costs	Ineligible Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For the sole purpose of implementing the project, be necessary and shall not be used for any other purpose• Reasonable and Verifiable, e.g. by evidence of public procurement, an invoice and receipt for payment• Duplicate public funding must not have been received, or will be received, from other sources for the same purpose• Other funding may be leveraged for the project, but the Community Climate Action Programme funding component must be able to stand on its own merits and be independent of the other funding• Funding must comply with State Aid requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Projects that solely benefit an individual or income generating projects• Training, staff costs etc.• Equipment, unless directly associated with the project• Overheads, operating, travel, transport, subsistence, notional, legal, insurance or banking, loan costs etc.• Costs incurred before the Letter of Offer is issued• Costs where more appropriate funding opportunities already exist

VAT is considered eligible for grant payment in cases where it cannot be reclaimed. For groups who cannot reclaim VAT, all their costs should be inclusive of VAT. If a group is able to reclaim VAT then their expenses should be exclusive of VAT. Documentation may be sought by Donegal County Council confirming the VAT status of the group, i.e. a recent letter, or letters, from the Revenue Commission confirming the VAT status. Every group will be required in their application form to declare their VAT status.

The Community Climate Action Officer will be able to advise what costs are eligible when groups are planning their projects.

Cost and budgeting

As part of the application community groups will need to prepare a budget detailing everything that they will need to pay for during the project.

Small projects: To ensure an application represents value for money, three written quotes must be sought and must be submitted with the application.

Where three quotes for a particular product/service is not possible or is overly burdensome in the case of multiple project components, this requirement may be waived, and the application may be evaluated on the quotes available.

Groups should consult with the Community Climate Action Officer prior to submitting their application if this situation arises.

Medium & Large projects: Please note that successful applicants will need to follow public procurement guidelines and depending on the type of work and cost, may need to get further quotes or seek quotes electronically through eTenders. The Community Climate Action Officer can advise groups on this.

- There is no requirement to choose the cheapest option.
- Communities must also consider green procurement where possible.
- Donegal County Council must be satisfied that the application represents value for money and that the applicant has engaged with suppliers in developing their proposal.
- When getting quotes from suppliers, groups should try to ensure that quotes will be valid for when they are carrying out the work, otherwise procurement may need to be repeated if groups are awarded funding.
- When drawing up costs it is advised to include a contingency to address any unforeseen changes to costs or inflation. This would be especially important for bigger projects.

For Strand 1a projects: All quotes must be provided in Euros and the relevant community group must absorb the sterling conversion rate, if there is one.

State Aid and De Minimis

Public funding is deemed to be 'State Aid' where it provides the recipient, whether an enterprise, not-for-profit organisation, or an individual, an economic advantage over others. To comply with State Aid rules, the level of funding provided to a project promoter must not exceed €300,000 - this is known as the De Minimis ceiling. De Minimis regulations sets a limit on how much assistance can be given to organisations. The current limit for a company, or group, irrespective of size or location, is €300,000 during the previous three-year fiscal period.

Many groups/ projects under this Programme would not be considered State Aid and therefore will not be subject to the De Minimis ceiling. However, community groups when submitting their application will need to clarify their status and if necessary declare if they have previously received any De Minimis State Aid (e.g. from a state agency, government department, Local Enterprise Office, local authority, LEADER funding etc.). The Community Climate Action Officer will be able to assist groups on this requirement.

6. Evaluation, Selection and Approval

The selection of projects is a competitive process. For a project to be successful and receive funding it needs to first pass the evaluation stage, then the selection stage and finally the approval stage.

1. Evaluation:

All applications will be evaluated by Donegal County Council Evaluation Committee to ensure they align with the objectives and eligibility of this Programme and will be marked against the selection criteria.

2. Selection:

Following evaluation, Donegal County Council will then select the final projects and may take account of the highest scores and:

- the geographical distribution of projects
- the desirability to fund a variety of different projects and across multiple themes
- the contribution of the projects to the climate action objectives of Donegal County Council

3. Approval:

The selected projects will be submitted by Donegal County Council to the Minister of the Environment, Climate and Communications for final approval. Success at the evaluation and selection stages is not a guarantee of funding. The Minister will have the ultimate decision as to what projects are approved and any specific conditions of funding.

Strand 1 Evaluation criteria

To ensure projects are selected in a transparent and fair manner, applications will be first evaluated on the following criteria.

Selection Criterion for Strand 1	
Selection Criterion	Basis for Assessment
<i>Relevance and Impact</i>	The project meets the objective of Strand 1 to build a low carbon community and can clearly demonstrate the impact of the project in contributing to Ireland's climate and energy targets.
<i>Innovation and Scalability</i>	The project contains practical innovation/(s) and/or approaches. It has the potential to be scaled up or replicated in other communities, post funding. The project has a lasting impact.
<i>Value for Money</i>	The costs applied for are reasonable, represent an efficient use of resources and are commensurate with the quality and nature of the activities proposed. Realistic, specific and relevant outputs and outcomes are identified, which are commensurate with the level of investment.
<i>Achievability</i>	The organisation/partnership has the appropriate expertise to deliver the proposed project. The proposal is clear and coherent and is deliverable within the timeframe. Key milestones are specified with an explanation of how these will be monitored.
<i>Partnership Approach</i>	Any Partner/Consortium roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined with partnership agreements in place (where applicable). The proposal demonstrates how all key stakeholders will be involved in the planning and implementation of the proposal.
<i>Governance Arrangements</i>	Any necessary governance and financial management systems, controls and processes are in place to meet the requirements of the Programme. Where applicable, evidence of tax compliance and registration with relevant bodies is supplied. Details of track record in managing other state funding is supplied.

Strand 1a Evaluation criteria

To ensure projects are selected in a transparent and fair manner, applications will be first evaluated on the following criteria.

Selection Criterion for Strand 1a	
Selection Criterion	Basis for Assessment
<i>Shared Island Relevance and Impact</i>	The project meets the objective of Strand 1a to build a low carbon community and can clearly demonstrate the impact of the project in contributing to climate and energy targets on a cross border basis on the island of Ireland and the sustainability objectives in the Shared Island chapter of the revised National Development Plan.
<i>Innovation and Scalability</i>	The project contains practical innovation/(s) and/or approaches. It has the potential to be scaled up or replicated in other communities, post funding. The project has a lasting impact.
<i>Value for Money</i>	The costs applied for are reasonable, represent an efficient use of resources and are commensurate with the quality and nature of the activities proposed. Realistic, specific and relevant outputs and outcomes are identified, which are commensurate with the level of investment.
<i>Achievability</i>	The organisation/partnership has the appropriate expertise to deliver the proposed project. The proposal is clear and coherent and is deliverable within the timeframe. Key milestones are specified with an explanation of how these will be monitored.
<i>Cross-border Partnership Approach</i>	Any Partner/Consortium roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined with partnership agreements in place (where applicable). The proposal demonstrates how all key stakeholders will be involved in the planning and implementation of the proposal. The proposal includes at least one partner in Northern Ireland, and at least 50% of awarded funding will be for project delivery in Northern Ireland.
<i>Governance Arrangements</i>	Any necessary governance and financial management systems, controls and processes are in place to meet the requirements of the Programme. Where applicable, evidence of tax compliance and registration with relevant bodies is supplied. Details of track record in managing other state funding is supplied.

Additional note on the evaluation of small-scale projects

Small projects will be evaluated under the same criteria listed above however consideration will be given to the smaller scale of the project. Projects should still be relevant and demonstrate impact. Thought should be given to the potential for replication by other communities, but they do not need to be innovative or scalable. Value for money is a key consideration, and can be achieved by acquiring three quotes, however there is no requirement to choose the cheapest option.

7. What to expect if your application is successful

Following the Minister's approval, Donegal County Council will issue a Letter of Offer to the successful communities setting out the terms and conditions. Groups are responsible for carrying out their projects and will have 18 months from the Letter of Offer to complete their projects.

Donegal County Council reserves the right to withdraw from a project if all requirements are not met within a reasonable period.

If an applicant is awarded a lower funding allocation from what was initially sought, the applicant may submit a revised programme of works to the satisfaction of Donegal County Council.

Payment and reporting

Successful applications for funding under this Programme will only be paid to the applicant group/organisation's Bank Account.

The Community Climate Action Officer will be developing case studies on projects and groups will be asked to provide details about their works and experiences.

All payments are subject to:

- Evidence of compliance with the public procurement guidelines. If the grantee does not comply with the public procurement guidelines, financial sanctions may apply e.g. expenditure will be deemed ineligible and will not be reimbursed.
- Evidence of compliance with Community Climate Action Fund Guidelines.
- Eligibility of the costs as per the Guidelines and Letter of Offer.

Pre-funding

The Community Climate Action Programme is a reimbursement grant (i.e. groups pay for the works and are refunded), however pre-funding (up to 25% of project costs) may be provided in very limited circumstances and on a case-by-case basis. Pre-funding will only be considered where a clear need has been identified and is evidenced by Donegal County Council. Groups will be asked when applying if they require pre-funding.

Pre-funding will be given out in instalments at set times over the lifetime of the project (e.g. quarterly). Only when groups have fully spent their first prefunding instalment (i.e. vouched expenditure has been submitted and approved by Donegal County Council) and have met the milestone criteria will the next instalment be released, and so on. The Council will agree with each individual group their prefunding instalment amounts and timelines. Prefunding should only be used for the payment of eligible costs approved by Donegal County Council. Any unused portion of prefunding that remains unspent at the end of the project must be returned/repaid to Donegal County Council immediately. Groups will be liable for unspent funds or ineligible costs.

Monitoring and Auditing

Monitoring of successful projects will be undertaken by Donegal County Council and reported to the Department of Environment Climate and Communications. Donegal County Council will collect agreed individual project outputs/outcomes to facilitate this process through the Annual Report, Mid-Year Progress Report and Final Report, during claims requests. A sample of projects may be selected annually for audit and verification purposes.

Data Protection

Information provided by applicants and those who receive funding will be utilised for the purposes of evaluating and administering this Programme, and to facilitate reporting, auditing and any site visits. When evaluating the applications and during the lifetime of the projects, Donegal County Council may share information with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. [Please click this link for Further Information on the Donegal County Council Privacy Statement.](#)

8. How to apply

Interested community groups should contact Donegal County Council's Community Climate Action Officer to discuss their project ideas. The Community Climate Action Officer is there to offer guidance to groups developing their projects and completing the application form.

Online Application form - [Community Climate Action Fund Application Form Link.](#)

- Applications Forms may be submitted via the Online Portal on the Donegal County Council Website:

<https://www.donegalcoco.ie/services/environment/climateaction/communityclimateactionfund/>

- To apply groups must complete the online application form.
- The application window is open from Friday 29th December 2023 (9:00am) to **Friday 22nd March 2024 (4:00pm).**
- No applications will be considered after the deadline.
- Only one application per organisation may be submitted.
- You can save the form as you go, so you do not need to complete and submit the application in one sitting.
- You will also be able to upload all relevant documentation.

9. Queries

For any queries on the Community Climate Action Fund please contact:

Fiona Kelly
Community Climate Action Officer
Donegal County Council

Email: climateactionfund@donegalcoco.ie