

Policy paper summary

Community and Employment Benefit Program

Modernising our electricity system is essential for clean, reliable and affordable energy across NSW, and is an opportunity for once-in-a-lifetime investment in the regions.

The building blocks of this transition are the Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) which host solar and wind farms and the new transmission lines that harness and share this energy with the state.

The NSW Government is consulting with REZ communities to deliver the Community and Employment Benefit Program, in recognition of their important role. It will allocate hundreds of millions of dollars statewide, funded by access fees payable by solar, wind and other energy generators.

The Community Employment Benefit Program Policy Paper (available on the EnergyCo website) sets out the principles by which the fund will operate. These principles align with the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap, the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* and Electricity Infrastructure Investment Regulation 2021 under which the program and its benefits are granted.



The program will be run for long-term community benefit. It is built on consultation with stakeholders and focuses on:

- NSW government, local council and First Nation priorities
- long-term legacy outcomes for communities
- coordination and co-funding to maximise value
- adaptation to changing local needs.



Upfront community consultation will continue throughout. Local voices inform the program, both upfront and through regular reviews. The key matters for consultation include local priorities, who is best placed to deliver initiatives, funding mixes and mechanisms, how communities can be supported to apply for funding, and input into program research and investigation.



The program will fund a broad range of benefits. Eligible projects include community services or facilities, employment or First Nations purposes such as public, community or health; accommodation or housing; energy or the environment; parks and recreation; education, arts, cultural or tourism; or employment, skills and training.

Its overall purpose is to invest in economic development, education, training, local industry, manufacturing and jobs, boost opportunities for First Nations people and foster local community support for new energy investment.



The benefits can be delivered in different ways. Funds may be granted to non-profit organisations, councils, education providers and others. NSW Government agencies may also partner in the initiatives, and EnergyCo may commission programs, services and/or infrastructure on behalf of the community.



The assessment panel will select initiatives based on sound criteria. While EnergyCo has the legal responsibility to administer the fund, recommendations will be made by an assessment panel of government officials informed by community and industry representatives. Initiatives will be prioritised based on their alignment with the program objectives and principles, published assessment criteria (set after community and stakeholder feedback), timeframe for delivery, and alignment with other government programs.



EnergyCo will administer the program fairly and inclusively. We will apply NSW Government policy, consult broadly, establish and support the REZ Community Benefit Committee, and partner with public agencies and the renewable industry. With assistance from the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, we are responsible for guidelines, documentation, stakeholder management and evaluating both individual projects and the program as a whole. EnergyCo will pursue legal compliance, efficiency, effectiveness and high ethical and probity standards in these tasks.

These policies have now been implemented in four grant streams for the Central West-Orana REZ. The Grant Guidelines for these set out the fund allocation process and criteria in more detail.