

First Peoples' Solar and Storage Initiative



Photo credit

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We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

DEECA is committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



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Message from the Minister



The First Peoples' Solar and Storage Initiative is an opportunity for a partnership between the Victorian Government, Australian Government and First Peoples' communities across Victoria.

The initiative is guided by the Victorian Government recognition and acknowledgement of the intrinsic connection of Traditional Owners to Country and their contribution in the management of land, water, the natural landscape and built environments.

The initiative contributes to the Victorian Government's commitment to support self-determination and brings to life the commitments I made at the Yoorrook Justice Commission's Land Injustice Inquiry (April 2024) that First Peoples' communities to be afforded genuine social and economic opportunities through renewable energy projects.

The First Peoples' Solar and Storage Initiative makes available total program funding of up to \$12.2 million, with up to \$700,000 funding available per project. This will provide energy generation and storage on Country, which is expected to increase access to renewable energy, help lower energy bills and increase energy reliability and resilience. The initiative will also support Traditional Owners to build capacity and capability within mob to participate in the energy transition.

This initiative will leverage the success of the \$10.92 million Neighbourhood Battery Initiative, commenced in 2021 funding feasibility studies and demonstration projects with a variety of neighbourhood-scale battery ownership and operational models, as well as build on existing solar and battery projects installed by Registered Aboriginal Parties under the Traditional Owner Renewable Energy Program.

The First Peoples' Solar and Storage Initiative is supporting First Peoples' Communities to take action to enable more local renewable energy generation and consumption and do so in a way that ensures communities can benefit from the renewable energy economy.

What is the First Peoples' Solar and Storage Initiative?

The First Peoples' Solar and Storage Initiative will provide grant funding to Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs), non-formally recognised Traditional Owner Corporations (TOCs), Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and other types of First Peoples' organisations to support the installation of neighbourhood-scale batteries and solar panel systems. Funding support is delivered via the Victorian Government's 100 Neighbourhood Batteries Program and the Australian Government's Community Solar Banks Program.

Victoria is on the path to Treaty with First Peoples' alongside Truth telling through the Yoorrook Justice Commission. The Yoorrook Justice Commission is the first formal truth-telling process into injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria.

Victoria's Treaty is about putting practical frameworks in place to implement better policies and make sure First People have a say in decisions that impact First Peoples' lives. We are on this path because throughout our history, First Peoples have been excluded from social and economic opportunities through the actions of successive governments.

Without significant change, this exclusion will continue – regardless of the good intentions of Victorians who embrace and respect Aboriginal people and culture.

As Victoria transitions from a centralised, fossil fuel powered energy system to renewable energy and storage, there will be economic opportunities for communities and decisions about how people are part of the transition. This initiative aims to support self-determination and the transfer of power and resources to First Peoples communities for cultural, economic, customary and spiritual purposes.

The initiative will provide funding to support First Peoples' organisations to invest in and benefit from solar and storage projects, with projects delivering these benefits back to their communities, in a way that is self-determined by each organisation.

The initiative also seeks to support the aims of the Australian Governments' First Nations Clean Energy Strategy for First Nations people to:

- participate in and benefit from the clean energy transformation
- ensure access for reliable clean energy for all Australians
- ensure First Nations cultural heritage, knowledge and connection to land and sea Country is respected

government and industry create opportunities to build deeper collaboration, consensus and new ways of work with First Nations people.

About the 100 Neighbourhood Batteries Program

The 100 Neighbourhood Batteries Program provides grants to support the installation of neighbourhood-scale batteries to improve energy reliability and provide energy storage capacity for locally generated solar power, increasing access to renewable energy and helping to lower energy bills. Administered by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), the program builds on lessons learned through the successful Neighbourhood Battery Initiative (NBI) and paves the way for a new generation of energy storage to benefit local communities.

The Victorian Government is funding these grants to achieve the following outcomes and objectives:

- benefits from local renewable energy and energy storage are passed on to consumers, including lowering household energy bills
- increased energy reliability
- increased energy resilience
- reduced costs of network upgrades
- support the ability of communities to personally contribute to Victoria's energy transition
- scale up the delivery of operational models for neighbourhood-scale batteries.

The Victorian Government is also providing funding support to Registered Aboriginal Parties to build renewable energy capacity through the Traditional Owner Renewable Energy Program and the First Peoples Adoption of Renewable Energy Program.

The Traditional Owner Renewable Energy Program (TOREP) was the Victorian Government's first tailored renewable energy grant program, supporting Traditional Owner Corporations to develop renewable energy strategies and plans, as well as install renewable energy.

The First Peoples' Adoption of Renewable Energy (FPARE) built on TOREP, to further expand knowledge of local energy systems and develop pathways to accelerate renewable energy opportunities in their community.

About the Community Solar Banks Program

The Australian Government is investing \$100 million into Community Solar Banks. The investment will provide shared solar systems and help to lower electricity costs for more than 25,000 households. This will create a fairer electricity system and reduce emissions.

Many households face barriers to installing their own rooftop solar because they live in apartment buildings, rental accommodation, or they simply can't afford it. The Australian Government is committed to supporting these households to access the benefits of solar, leading to a more equitable electricity system and reducing emissions.

The Community Solar Banks program is funded by the Australian Government and is partnering with states and territories to deliver this program.

Shared community solar banks help households who can't install their own systems. This will allow more households and communities to benefit from renewable energy.

Grant amount and duration

The First Peoples' Solar and Storage Initiative makes available total program funding of up to \$12.2 million, with up to \$700,000 project funding available per project. Grant funding is available to support the successful delivery of solar and battery storage projects and to build capacity in First Peoples' communities to participate in the energy transition. This includes staffing costs to support project delivery and build capacity within communities.

Projects must be completed by December 2026.

Stream 1 – Registered Aboriginal Parties

Stream 1 of the First Peoples' Solar and Storage Initiative makes grant funding available to Victoria's 12 formally recognised Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs). This funding stream is not allocated through a competitive process, it will be available to all RAPs should they choose to participate in the initiative.

Funding is provided to support projects that deliver a range of benefits to Registered Aboriginal Parties and First Peoples, for example, improved financial outcomes through reduced energy or operational costs or revenue streams, increased employment, and capacity to deliver services to community or participate in the energy transition.

DEECA will provide project design and support for RAP applicants to develop a robust project scope, budget and delivery plan prior to execution of a funding agreement. All efforts will be made to streamline this process wherever possible to limit the administrative burden on RAPs.

Project development, led by the RAP with support from DEECA, is expected to occur from January to June 2025 with funding agreements to be signed by July 2025.

If required, applicants can arrange for a third party organisation to support them and manage funding and project administration on their behalf.

What might be funded?

Guaranteed funding of up to \$700,000 is available for each of the 12 RAPs for projects that:

- install one or more neighbourhood batteries and solar PV systems that provide benefits to First Peoples' of Victoria. This may include:
 - behind or in front of the meter systems
 - projects that reduce operational costs for the RAP
 - projects in partnership with energy retailers, such as developing a First Peoples' owned generation source coupled to a retail product for the community that provides lower cost energy backed by solar and batteries
 - energy back-up systems that are capable of continuing power supply to a culturally appropriate, accessible location to access during grid outages.
 - Staffing costs to support project delivery and build capacity within communities.
- install a chemical battery of a minimum size 20kW/40kWh and maximum 5MW/20MWh and install a new or expand an existing solar PV system. Projects may install solar only or battery storage only, however this will reduce the total funding available.
- are able to complete a project by December 2026.

Participating Organisation

Applications may also identify one or more project partners as a Participating Organisation(s).

A Participating Organisation means any Company (or other entity) working with the Registered Aboriginal Party on, and/or providing funding to the Recipient for, the Project, other than a Government Funder or a Subcontractor.

Applications should clearly list the name and ABN of each Participating Organisation.

Stream 2 – Not-for-profit First Peoples’ organisations

Stream 2 of the First Peoples’ Solar and Storage Initiative makes grant funding available to not-for-profit First Peoples’ organisations through a competitive grant process.

Who can apply?

The following organisations are eligible to apply for funding:

- Non-formally recognised Traditional Owner Corporations
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Aboriginal trusts and cooperatives
- Other non-for-profit First Peoples’ organisations

In addition, to be eligible for funding applicants must:

- be located/based in Victoria;
- have an Australian Business Number (ABN).
- be an incorporated body, co-operative or association (including business associations), applicants who are not incorporated or have an ABN, may arrange for an auspicing organisation to support them and manage funding and project administration on their behalf.

What might be funded?

Funding of up to \$700,000 per system is available for projects that:

- install one or more neighbourhood battery and solar PV system that provides benefits to First Peoples’ of Victoria. This may include:
 - behind or in front of the meter systems
 - projects in partnership with energy retailers, such as developing a First Peoples’ owned generation source coupled to a retail product for the community that provides lower cost energy backed by solar and batteries
 - energy back-up systems that are capable of continuing power supply to a culturally appropriate, accessible location to access during grid outages
 - reduce operational costs for the organisation that will be invested to increase services to First Peoples’ communities.
 - reducing bills for Aboriginal owned community housing (eg; with embedded networks to enable shared solar and storage). Household scale solar and battery systems will not be considered for funding, systems must be larger scale, shared solar and/or battery systems.
- Staffing costs to support project delivery and build capacity within communities.
- install a chemical battery of a minimum size 20kW/40kWh and maximum 5MW/20MWh and install a new or expand an existing solar PV system. Projects may install solar only or battery storage only, however this will reduce funding to \$350,000.
- are ready and suitable for this type of project and will complete project delivery by December 2026.

Participating Organisation

Applications may also identify one or more project partners as a Participating Organisation(s).

A Participating Organisation means any Company (or other entity) working with the Lead Organisation on, and/or providing funding to the Recipient for, the Project, other than a Government Funder or a Subcontractor.

Applications should clearly list the name and ABN of each Participating Organisation.

Applications for more than one battery

Stream 2 applicants seeking funding for installation of more than one battery or energy back up system are encouraged to submit a single application in which the combined funding sought equals no more than the total eligible per project (\$700,000) funding. Where projects are seeking funding for multiple batteries, DEECA reserves the right to partially fund projects.

Priorities for funding (Stream 2 only)

For projects seeking funding for a solar and battery systems with one or more of the following attributes will be given priority:

- contributing to completed or scheduled works that supports switching from gas to electric appliances in the local community and/or the premises on which the battery is located
- located in network areas with poor reliability, particularly in regional areas where addition of a neighbourhood battery will increase energy reliability

For projects seeking funding for a solar / battery(s) and energy back-up systems projects with one or more of the following attributes will be given priority:

- high incidence of historical electricity outages (both frequency and duration)
- no or limited community accessible or culturally safe powered buildings available during electricity outages
- located in network areas with poor reliability, particularly in regional areas where addition of a neighbourhood battery will increase energy reliability
- vulnerability to extreme weather events likely to impact electricity infrastructure (e.g. storms, bushfires)

DEECA provides no guarantee that any of the projects applied for will be funded following evaluation of applications. No undertaking is given on the amount of individual or total grant monies that will be provided.

Who cannot apply?

The following organisations and individuals cannot apply for funding under either stream:

- non-Aboriginal groups or organisations;
- private individuals;
- local government authorities;
- federal / state government departments or agencies
- for profit businesses.

What will not be funded?

The First Peoples Solar and Storage Initiative will not fund the following activities:

- business as usual costs, including salaries and wages for personnel **not** employed to support renewable energy activities
- routine or ongoing maintenance activities, including but not limited to, operational and/or maintenance costs of running a neighbourhood battery or solar system
- land acquisition and related expenses
- expenditure on other projects
- projects that have already commenced construction
- the use of any new or hopeful technologies that are lower than Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 9 (See arena.gov.au/assets/2014/02/Technology-Readiness-Levels.pdf)
- feasibility studies or business cases (Stream 2 only)
- activities located outside the State of Victoria.

What are the assessment criteria and process? (Stream 2 only)

Applications are first checked for eligibility to make sure that the applicant and their activities are eligible for funding. After that, eligible applications will be assessed using the criteria listed below. Each criterion is given a percentage weighting to indicate its relative importance in the assessment process. Applications should address all relevant criteria.

Criteria	Weighting	Requirements
Why should the project be funded?	30%	<p>Applicants are required to describe how the project will contribute to the intended outcomes of the program including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of how the project aligns with the program objectives and the objectives of the Australian First Nations Clean Energy Strategy. • Details of how the project meets any of the priorities for funding listed in these Application Guidelines • Details of financial viability or electrical savings.
How complete is the application?	20%	<p>Applicants are required to demonstrate evidence of project planning including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of the battery(s) (size, location, number, and configuration) (if applicable) • Details of the solar panel system(s) (if applicable) • Details of any energy back-up system(s) (if applicable) • A completed Project Delivery Schedule, budget and risk register with details of the battery(s), solar system(s), site(s), insurance, project timeline and a description of the skills available within the project team and project partners etc. • Letter(s) of support from project partners, including First Peoples businesses and Traditional Owners where appropriate
Who will the project benefit?	30%	<p>Applicants are required to provide details of project benefits, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the benefits from local renewable energy generation and storage be passed onto First Peoples, including, but not limited to, providing more services, providing services of a higher quality, reduced electricity bills etc.

Criteria	Weighting	Requirements
What are the project's economics?	20%	<p>Applicants proposing a behind the meter installation are required to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data on onsite electricity consumption and generation¹, and modelling on how the battery will reduce premises' energy costs and/or improve energy reliability. <p>Applicants installing a front of meter battery and/or solar system are required to provide a financial model that includes (at a minimum):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expected return on investment (ROI) over the life of the battery(s) Expected revenues over the life of the battery and solar system(s), including the source of these revenue projections Expected costs over the lifetime of the battery and solar system(s), with clear breakdown of cost categories Calculation of the battery and solar system(s) capital cost per kilowatt hour Calculation of the total project cost per kilowatt hour of total installed battery(s) Clear identification of all assumptions underpinning model.

What supporting documents will need to be provided

All applicants must submit the following documents with your application:

1. Project delivery schedule template
2. Budget (see DEECA template)
3. Risk Management Log
4. Any other documents to support and provide context for the applications such as strategic plans and Country Plans

DEECA templates for some of the above are available at deeca.vic.gov.au/grants. Applicants are encouraged to use DEECA's Budget template but are permitted to use their own templates for the Project Delivery Schedule and Risk Management Log, as long as they are similar in content and format. The Risk Management Log must include risks associated with the delivery of the project as funded by this grant, and ongoing operational risks associated with the battery's operation.

Submission requirements

Failure to provide all supporting documents may render your application ineligible.

Attachments should be limited to the requested information – any additional information may not be considered.

At DEECA's absolute discretion, DEECA may request that an applicant provide additional proof of claims or statements contained in their application.

¹ A minimum of 12 months consumption and generation data or since installation date of assets if installed less than 12 months ago.

What are the funding conditions?

Funding agreements

Successful applicants must enter into a funding agreement with Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

The Victorian Government Common Funding Agreement is used for not-for-profit entities.

It is recommended that applicants review the terms and conditions before applying:

- Victorian Common Funding Agreement: www.vic.gov.au/victorian-common-funding-agreement

Where a streamlined funding agreement is in place with a Registered Aboriginal Party, this can be used as the funding agreement for this initiative.

Funding must not be used for political campaigning or advocacy activities for political parties.

Legislative and regulatory requirements

In delivering the activity, grant recipients are required to comply with all relevant Australian and state/territory legislations and regulations, including but not limited to:

- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Vic)
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Climate Change Act 2017*
- *Electricity Safety Act 1998*
- *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005*
- *Electricity Industry Act 2000*.

Tax implications

Applicants should consult the Australian Taxation Office or seek professional advice on any taxation implications that may arise from this grant funding. Each applicant is responsible for investigating their own tax structure and treatment.

Successfully funded projects will be offered funding as a **GST exclusive** amount. However, for non-government related organisations with an ABN and who are GST registered, payment will be made **GST inclusive**. Recipients are responsible for determining their tax liabilities for grant payments. Grants provided by DEECA are classified as income and tax may be payable by recipients.

Acknowledging the Australian and Victorian Government's support

Grant recipients must:

- follow DEECA's *Acknowledgment and Publicity Guidelines for Victorian Government Funding Support*. The guidelines will form part of the funding agreement and can be accessed here deeca.vic.gov.au/grants.
- agree to acknowledge the Australian Government's support in all material, publications, promotional and advertising published in connection with this Program.

Please ensure the following text is used in all published and printed materials or signage:

"The [Name of service/project] is/was supported by the Australian and Victorian Governments through the First Peoples' Solar and Storage Initiative."

Recipients must liaise with the departmental program area to coordinate any public events or announcements related to the project. The departmental program area will liaise and pass on relevant details to the Australian Government representatives.

Payments

Payments will be made as long as:

- the funding agreement has been signed by both parties
- grant recipients provide reports as required, or otherwise (as agreed by DEECA) that demonstrate the activity is progressing as expected
- other terms and conditions of funding continue to be met.

Monitoring and reporting

Grant recipients are required to comply with project monitoring and reporting requirements as outlined in the funding agreement. This may include progress reports, site inspections, completion reports and acquittal documentation, and may be submitted as a written or verbal report. All efforts will be made to streamline this requirement wherever possible to limit the administrative burden on the recipient.

Where a streamlined funding agreement is in place with a Registered Aboriginal Party, the monitoring and reporting requirements from this initiative will be integrated into these existing arrangements.

Recipients are responsible for project delivery, including any project cost overruns should they occur. In cases where a project is delayed for an unreasonable length of time, where substantive changes to scope are made after funding has been approved without prior approval of DEECA, or where a project fails to be delivered, DEECA reserves the right to cancel the grant and, if applicable, recoup any payment that has already been provided.

Cost

DEECA is not liable for any costs, expenses, losses, claims or damages that may be incurred by applicants in connection with the application process, including in preparing or submitting an application, providing further information to DEECA, or participating in negotiations with DEECA.

Probity for application procedures

The applicant and any of its associates must not offer any incentive to, or otherwise attempt to influence any of the persons who are either directly or indirectly involved in the application process, or in awarding any subsequent contract. If DEECA determines that the applicant or any of its associates have violated this condition, the applicant may be disqualified from further consideration, at DEECA's absolute discretion.

By submitting an application, the applicant consents to DEECA performing probity and financial investigations and procedures in relation to the applicant or any of its associates. The applicant agrees, if requested by DEECA, to seek consents from individuals to allow such probity checks.

Privacy

Any personal information about you or a third party in your application will be collected by the department for the purposes of administering your grant application and informing Members of Parliament of successful applications. Personal information may also be disclosed to external experts, such as members of assessment panels, or other Government departments for assessment, reporting, advice, comment, or for discussions regarding alternative or collaborative grant funding opportunities. If you intend to include personal information about third parties in your application, please ensure that they are aware of the contents of this privacy statement.

Any personal information about you or a third party in your correspondence will be collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and other applicable laws.

DEECA is committed to protecting the privacy of personal information. You can find the DEECA Privacy Policy online at deeca.vic.gov.au/privacy.

Requests for access to information about you held by DEECA should be sent to the Manager Privacy, P.O. Box 500 East Melbourne 8002 or contact by emailing foi.unit@deeca.vic.gov.au.

Auspicing

Applicants who do not meet the above requirements can still apply for funding but must operate under an auspice organisation. An auspice can support multiple applicants.

An auspice organisation must:

- be a registered cooperative, entity or an incorporated association
- hold public liability insurance of at least \$3 million and volunteer personal accident insurance, with enough allowance to cover the project's duration
- agree to take responsibility for the safety, financial management and insurance of the applicant group or organisation
- sign the funding agreement, receive the grant payment and be accountable for the delivery and reporting of the project delivery
- provide a letter or email of support to be attached to the application

DEECA will provide support prior to applications opening to discuss project ideas, application documentation and alignment with program objectives. To seek time to discuss please contact the DEECA team via neighbourhood.batteries@deeca.vic.gov.au or firstpeoplesenergy@deeca.vic.gov.au.

What is the application process?

Applications are submitted online using the Grants Online portal. To apply, go to the grant program web page (deeca.vic.gov.au/grants) and click on the 'Start New Application' button. To return to a saved draft application, click on the 'Access Saved Application' button.

Attaching required documents

Supporting documents must be in an acceptable file type, such as Word, Excel, PDF, or JPEG. The maximum file size for each file is 10MB.

You will receive an application number when you submit an application online. Please quote this number in all communications with the department relating to your application.

If you have documents to submit that cannot be attached to your online application, you can email them to grantsinfo@deeca.vic.gov.au, quoting your application number. Attach all documents to one email, zipping the files if required.

Make sure your application is submitted by **11.00am on 19 May 2025**.

Additional information

Email the Program Team at neighbourhood.batteries@deeca.vic.gov.au

Applicants can submit clarification questions in relation to the application guidelines, the application process and the broader Program to DEECA. Questions must be lodged no later than 5pm Eastern Standard Daylight Savings Time, seven calendar days before applications close.

Any information provided by DEECA in response to any question raised by a potential applicant may be uploaded onto the "Frequently Asked Questions" webpage. Clarification questions can be submitted to neighbourhood.batteries@deeca.vic.gov.au

**If you require assistance submitting your application online, email
grantsinfo@deeca.vic.gov.au**

What is the notification process?

Successful and unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing after the assessment process is completed. All decisions are final and are not subject to further review. Unsuccessful applicants can ask for feedback on their application.

Key dates

Applications open (Stream 2)	7 April 2025
Questions close (Stream 2)	5.00 pm, seven calendar days before applications close
Applications close (Stream 1)	N/A
Applications close (Stream 2)	19 May 2025
Applicants notified and funding agreements to be executed (Streams 1 and 2)	By June 2025
Activities commence (Streams 1 and 2)	July 2025
Activities completed and acquittal reports submitted (Streams 1 and 2)	December 2026

Should you have any questions, email neighbourhood.batteries@deeca.vic.gov.au

Checklist

Please review all the information about this grant program at energy.vic.gov.au/grants before submitting an application.

Have you completed the following steps?

- read these guidelines carefully
- checked if you are, or your organisation is, eligible for this grant funding
- checked if your project activity is eligible for this grant funding
- checked that you would be able to comply with all relevant laws and regulations in delivery of your project
- prepared and attached the appropriate supporting documents