SSEN Transmission Strategic Investment Fund Application Guidance

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

TRANSMISSION

About the fund

The Strategic Investment Fund has been developed in response to extensive engagement with communities, stakeholders and regional partners across our network area. Through this consultation, we heard a clear desire for investment that goes beyond supporting individual projects and instead tackles some of the most significant social and economic challenges facing communities today.

Designed to complement and enhance our existing regional funding programmes, the Strategic Investment Fund will focus on large-scale initiatives capable of delivering transformational change across multiple communities. We are seeking bold ideas, strong partnerships and innovative approaches that align with key strategies, create lasting impact, unlock new opportunities and leave a positive legacy for future generations.

Your project must support at least one of the following themes:

1. **Skills and employability**
2. **Alleviating fuel poverty**

Priority will be given to projects that are:

- **Regional** – benefiting multiple communities across a wider geographic area
- **Strategic** – aligned with regional priorities and addressing significant challenges
- **Sustainable** – attracting additional investment and delivering enduring benefits
- **Collaborative** – bringing together organisations, sectors and expertise
- **Transformational** – creating substantial and lasting positive change for communities

Who can apply?

Applications are welcome from:

- Legally constituted community groups
- Registered charities
- Non-profit organisations
- Universities and colleges

Applications directly from statutory bodies, such as local authorities, will not be accepted. However, these organisations may participate as project partners where another eligible organisation acts as the lead applicant.

Projects must benefit communities located within the SSEN Transmission network area.

Funding can support both capital and revenue costs.

What is the fund value?

The Strategic Investment Fund is intended to support a small number of exceptional projects with the scale and ambition to deliver transformational outcomes across our network area.

£10 million of funding will be available over the next two years, with £5 million of funding available in each funding round.

Applications are expected to range from £1 million to £5 million, with funding targeted towards initiatives that can demonstrate a compelling vision, strategic approach, strong partnership working and the potential to deliver significant, measurable and lasting impact for communities.

Funding is available for both revenue and capital costs. Where necessary, full cost recovery is also available, meaning that you are able to apply for all your organisation's costs, including the direct costs of your project and associated overheads.

SSEN Transmission is a Real Living Wage funder, meaning that any salary costs applied for must be the Real Living Wage as a minimum. If you are considering applying for multi-year funding, please ensure that any uplifts in salary costs, due to inflation, are taken into account.

Application process

The Fund has a two-stage process beginning with the submission of an Expression of Interest (EOI). This EOI will be assessed, and the projects that align best with the Fund's priorities and are ready to deliver transformational impact will be invited to submit a full application

Timeline

Expression of Interest opens - 17 September

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Expression of Interest closes - 15 October @ 1pm

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Full applications open - 29 October

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Full application closes - 10 December @ 1pm

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Full application decisions made - March 2027

What are the aims of the fund?

This fund will support projects that fall within the following themes. Priorities have been provided to indicate the types of projects the fund is looking to support as well as what isn't a current focus.

Theme 1. Skills and employability
The fund will prioritise projects that: a. Help young people to gain skills or move into employment b. Support apprenticeships and work-based learning c. Develop skills relevant to future industries and emerging employment opportunities d. Have a strong link to qualifications or employment outcomes e. Are focussed on inclusion and supporting people who face barriers to employment f. Address shortages of key skills by focusing on well-evidenced regional priorities
The fund is not looking to support projects that: a) Support beneficiaries of primary school age or younger

Theme 2. Alleviating fuel poverty
The fund will prioritise projects that: a. Improve the energy efficiency of homes b. Focus on the rural and island communities most affected by fuel poverty c. Focus on developing solutions for those at the highest risk of fuel poverty due to financial hardship d. Explore new approaches linked to research, or deliver demonstration projects capable of wider replication
The fund is not looking to support projects that: a) Fund the direct costs of energy consumption b) Provide traditional advice services c) Are community energy initiatives generating electricity for sale

In addition, applications will **not** be considered if they fall under the following categories:

- The advancement of religion or politics (including requests to support the core activities of religious or political groups)
- Direct costs of energy consumption
- The repayment of loans or payment of debts
- Trips abroad
- Costs already incurred or activities which will take place before a funding decision has been made (retrospective funding)

- Payments towards areas generally understood to be the primary responsibility of a statutory authority

What do we mean by 'regional'?

A regional project is one that benefits more than one community and has wider impact.

This could be one of the following:

- A project that delivers across multiple local authority areas in the network area
- A project that delivers across the majority of a local authority area
- A project that delivers in only one part of a larger local authority area (i.e. Caithness in Highland or Bute and Cowal in Argyll and Bute)
- A project on a larger island can be considered regional if the benefits are felt across the island. For smaller islands, benefits should be delivered across multiple islands.
- A project that is specific to one area initially but demonstrates significant potential to be replicated across the north of Scotland, bringing benefits to a larger area.

Applying to the fund

Stage 1 – Expression of Interest

The first stage in the application process is submission of an Expression of Interest. This will allow us to assess your project and its suitability for the Fund. Due to the limited funding available, we will only be progressing a small number of projects to full application stage.

The following table outlines the questions in the EOI and an indication of how we expect you to answer them.

No	Question	Guidance to answer question
1	**Organisation**	Name of the lead applicant
2	**Name of key contact**	Main contact for any enquiries
3	**Contact details for key contact**	Email of the key contact for this project
4	**Project name**	The name of your project
5	**Project Description (max 4,000 characters)**	• Your vision for the project. • The activities you will deliver • The main outputs you anticipate • How you will monitor and evaluate the success of the project • The proposed start and end dates for the project.

6	**Fit with Fund themes** **(max 2,000 characters)**	Briefly outline how the project aligns with at least one of the two themes 1. Skills and employability 2. Alleviating Fuel Poverty.
7	**Outcomes** **(max 2,000 characters)**	List the main SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) outcomes you anticipate from the project
8	**Location** **(max 2,000 characters)**	Provide an outline of where the project will take place and where the main beneficiaries will be
9	**Strategic fit** **(max 2,000 characters)**	Please provide details of how the project aligns with key thematic or geographical strategies
10	**Partnerships** **(max 2,000 characters)**	Outline any other organisations who will be involved with the design and delivery of this project and their role
11	**How will you manage the project?** **(max 2,000 characters)**	Outline the governance and project management approach
12	**High level cost breakdown** **(max 2,000 characters)**	Provide details of the main budget lines and the anticipated total project costs
13	**Funding** **(max 2,000 characters)**	Provide details of other funders, and whether or not funding has been secured
14	**Project Readiness** **(max 2,000 characters)**	If awarded funding in March 2027 - when would the project be ready to start and what steps are required before project initiation

The deadline for the submission of the Expression of Interest is the 15 October at 1pm.

We will notify you by the 29 October whether or not your project has been selected to advance to a full application

When you are ready you can complete an Expression of Interest here: [Strategic Investment Fund - Expression of Interest – Fill in form]

Stage 2 – Full application guidance

The guidance from this point on relates to submission of a full application to the fund.

How will applications be assessed?

At this stage applications will be assessed based on how well they fit with the fund themes and priorities (outlined above).

In addition, all projects will be assessed on the following:

- **Value for money** – providing evidence that the project has a high impact for the amount invested e.g. project outcomes, number of beneficiaries.
- **Community involvement** – evidence that the community/communities and relevant stakeholders have been engaged in the development and implementation of a project, e.g. surveys, service user involvement, community consultations, open days, letters of support, volunteering days etc.
- **Financial sustainability** – Evidencing that a project will continue beyond the funding period, or where this is not possible, defining an end point for the project and how it will be responsibly closed.
- **Community demand/need** – Evidence of an identified need and gap in local provision, e.g. Community Action Plan/Local Place Plan, service user surveys, research, SIMD data etc.
- **Deliverability** – Evidence that the project has been clearly thought through, that the required resources will be available to deliver the project (for example, through bringing in match-funding or loan finance) and that any partners needed to deliver the project are already committed to being involved. Contingency costs can also be included in your application. Whilst match funding is not a requirement, having other funding sources in place can provide supporting evidence of the viability of a project.

Applying to the fund

- SSE operate an online Community Investment Portal. The portal ensures all applicant data is held securely and makes it easier for groups to apply for and manage grants.
- To assist you in preparing your application, we have provided a document that outlines all the questions you will be asked in the online application process. We encourage applicants to familiarise themselves with the questions and prepare answers in advance to ensure a smooth and efficient application experience.
- SSE recommend you prepare your answers to the questions offline and then copy them into the online application.
- There are six stages to completing an application.
- You can view videos on navigating the SSE Community Investment Portal here.
- You can read Frequently Asked Questions about the SSE Community Investment Portal here

- If you have any problems in accessing or using the SSE Community Investment Portal, please contact the communtyfundsupport@sse.com

The process map overleaf visually outlines the application process for groups to become registered on the Community Investment Portal. The process is then outlined in more detail later in this document.

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Community Investment Portal Process Map

1 FUND WEBPAGE

- Click on "Begin New Application".
- This will take you to the SSE Community Investment Portal.

2 CHECK ELIGIBILITY

- Yes or No questions to ensure your project is eligible.

3 SET-UP USER ACCOUNT

- For **New Users only** (returning applicants skip to step 5).
- Click on "Not Registered".
- Enter your name and email address.
- Check your emails and click on confirmation link.
- Create your password.
- Your Username is your email address with .sse at the end, e.g. joe.bloggs@outlook.com.sse

4 COMMUNITY INVESTMENT HOMEPAGE

- Repeat Step 1 - Go to Fund Webpage and click on "Begin New Application".
- Answer Eligibility Questions again.
- Login to begin application.

5 SET UP GROUP ACCOUNT

- Answer questions relating to your group.
- **N.B. You must have your groups constitution/ governance document ready to upload to complete this step.**

6 APPLICATION FORM

- Answer questions and upload supporting documention relating to the project being applied for.
- Prepare in advance - application questions are provided at the end of this document .
- Applications will save at key points. To continue an existing application - click on the "Continue Existing Applications" on the Fund Webpage.

Guidance on the Community Investment Portal

Stage 1 – Fund webpage

- To access the correct application, you need to visit the fund webpage. If you are creating a new application, click 'Begin New Application' and then follow the steps below.
- If you have already created a draft application, please click 'Continue Existing Application' on the fund webpage, log in to your account, click 'My Applications' on the home screen, and then 'launch' next to your draft application.

Stage 2 – Eligibility

- When you access the Strategic Investment Fund application for the first time you will be asked to answer some yes and no questions to ensure your project is eligible for the fund.
- If your project is not eligible you will be directed to where you can find information about other SSE community funds.
- If your project is eligible, you will be directed to log on to the Community Investment Portal to access or create your user account.

Stage 3 – Setting up a user account

If you have previously used the Community Investment Portal, please log in using your username and password, and progress to Stage 5.

If you have never used the Community Investment Portal before, you will need to create an account.

To create an account, click 'not registered?' and enter your name and email address. You will then receive an email to confirm that the account has been registered, containing your username.

IMPORTANT

Please note that your username will be your email address with .sse at the end (e.g. joe.blogs@outlook.com.sse).

Please click on the link in the email to create a password.

Stage 4 – Community Investment Homepage

Once you have created a password, you will be automatically redirected to the Community Investment Portal homepage.

To continue with your application, please repeat Stage One (go to the relevant fund page, click 'Begin New Application' and complete the eligibility questions). You will then be able to log in and continue with the below steps.

Stage 5 – Creating a group account

When starting a new application, you will be asked to select the group you wish to apply on behalf of. If you have already completed an application on behalf of a group previously, you can select the group from the drop-down menu.

If this is your groups first time applying on the SSE Community Investment Portal you will need to register a group account. This information will be stored and used for all future applications by the group on SSE's Community Investment Portal.

IMPORTANT

You need to upload a copy of the group's constitution at this stage – make sure you have this available before starting.

You need to do stage five in one attempt to create an account on the system.

To create an account, you will be asked the following questions:

Question	Guidance to answer question
Name of group	This should be the name that appears on your group's governing document and bank account statement.
Type of group	You will be able to select from a list: Unincorporated voluntary or community organisation; SCIO; registered charity (other); Company limited by guarantee; Community Interest Company; Community Benefit Society; Community Council; Other If your group has one, you will be asked to provide its registered charity and/or company number so please have this to hand.
Phone number	Please enter a phone number on which we can contact the group to discuss the application or grant.
Website	Your organisations website
Number of people	• on your group's board or management committee – in total, not just office bearers • employed by the group • who volunteer for the group.
Date Established	Please provide the date that your group's governing document was adopted, or if it is a registered company or charity, the date it was registered with the regulator.
What are the groups aims and objectives?	Please provide a summary of your main aims and objectives
What are the groups main activities?	Provide a summary of the main activities or services the group delivers and/or has delivered to-date.
Communities supported	State which communities or beneficiary groups your group supports. For example, all residents in the community your group is set up to benefit, or young people, or people who are not in education, employment or training.

Constitution upload	Upload the latest version of your group's governing document adopted by the members.
Correspondence address	Please provide the address where you would like to receive any correspondence
Registered address	This is the address at which your group or organisation is formally registered, which may differ from the correspondence address.

Stage 6 -Application form

You may prefer to prepare your answers to the project questions offline and then copy them into the application, The community investment manager can provide a word template of the questions if this would help you.

IMPORTANT

You need to upload a copy the following documents in stage two:

- A copy of one of the group's bank statements from the last three months
- A copy of the group's most recent approved annual accounts
- A copy of your project budget (or you can use the budget template provided in the application form)
- Copies of quotes for works or goods included in the project budget (if applicable)
- A copy of the organisation's Child Protection/Vulnerable Adult Policy (if applicable)
- A proportionate Business Case for you project (preferably using the Five Case Model)
- Letters of support for your project (if applicable)
- Any other documents which you think are required in support of your application.

PLEASE NOTE - due to GDPR we ask you not to include any photos which include people.

About the project

Question	Guidance to answer question

Please give a summary of the project or activity you are requesting a grant towards	What will the project deliver and who will benefit. The description should be no more than 25 words.
Please provide a postcode that best represents the project's delivery location.	Provide an indication of the geographic area the project will be delivered in.
Please provide a description of the project (maximum 3000 characters)	We suggest you cover: • What is your vision for the project • How you will do this – e.g. the activities you will deliver, where/ when/ how often you will deliver them, how you will reach those you are seeking to benefit • Who will be the main partners in the project and what role they will play • Who will lead and manage the project – their role(s), skills and experience • How you will monitor and evaluate the success of the project • The proposed start and end dates for the project.
How will you maintain / sustain your project after the period of our grant funding is finished? (maximum 3000 characters)	• If the project will continue beyond the period for which you are seeking grant funding, please let us know how you intend to continue it, including how you will secure any funding, volunteers, or other resources needed to do so. • Please also include relevant details if the project will help to make your organisation more self-sustaining.
How have you identified a need for this project within the local area? (maximum 2000 characters)	• Your project should address a current need and gap in provision. • Please provide relevant data that demonstrates this need
How many people will benefit from the project? (maximum 1200 characters)	Only include those who will benefit directly from the project. This may include any volunteers involved in delivering it. Please ensure the number you give is realistic. Please tell us how you arrived at this figure.
Will any jobs be supported by the project?	If yes, we will ask how many.
Will any community assets (e.g. community hall, footpath) be built and/or improved as part of the project?	If yes, we will ask how many.
Will this project help improve energy efficiency or climate change?	If yes, please provide details of the energy generation or carbon reduction potential of the project, where you know this.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

SSE's community programme supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We will ask you to identify the primary UN Sustainable Development Goal that your project contributes to and will allow you to also identify secondary goals. You can find out more about the UN SDG’s at: [Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org)]

UN Sustainable Development Goal	Example
	Your project will improve people's well-being, physical health or emotional health e.g. community care services, sports classes, befriending services.
	Your project will support people to enter work, will help schools to deliver new activity or would help community members learn new skills.
	Your project helps communities to have affordable and modern energy e.g. insulation measures, new heating systems.
	Your project will enhance the local economy e.g. projects which employ people in the local area, the development of social enterprise activity, projects to increase tourism to the area.
	Your project will help enhance the local community e.g. improving a community hall, building new community sports Centre, running a community event.
	Your project will help to combat climate change e.g. community renewables.
	Your projects which help the local environment e.g. community owned forests, community gardens, community nature paths.

Project aims and success

Question	Guidance to answer question
What are the intended outcomes of the project	• Please provide the economic, social and/or environmental benefits/changes that you seek to make from your programme.

and how will you measure success?	• Where possible make sure your outcomes are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) • Make sure your outcomes link logically to the needs gap you have identified. • Please limit the number of outcomes to a manageable number (we suggest no more than 5 outcomes). • Please also consider any further information provided in the fund guidance notes.
Please explain how your project achieves the Fund aims and priorities outlined in the fund guidance document.	The priorities for the Strategic Investment Fund are: • Skills and employability • Alleviating fuel poverty It is also important to be able to showcase the strategic aims of the project.
Will your project contribute to the local economy?	If yes, you will be asked to describe how.
Is this a new project?	If no, you will be asked to describe how it has been funded to date.

Project Bank Details and Group Finances

Question	Guidance to answer question
Bank account holder's name	This is the name that your group's bank account is held in, as it appears on bank statements - it should be the name of your group.
Sort code Account number	Please ensure the details you provide here are correct as this information will be used to make grant payments if you are successful in securing a grant.
Upload a copy of a recent bank statement	This should be one bank statement from the last 3 months **This is a mandatory field on the form** so please make sure you have the statement available before starting the application.
Upload a copy of the group's latest accounts	This should be the version approved by the group's board or management committee. **This is a mandatory field on the form** so please make sure you have the statement available before starting the application.
Name, email address and position of an additional authorised bank signatory	You need to provide the details of a second person who is authorised to use your group's bank account. **Please ensure you enter these details correctly as this person will be e-mailed any grant offer letter for their countersignature.**

What are the main sources of income for the group? (maximum 1200 characters)	Provide brief details of how the group normally raises most of its income e.g. from local fundraising, grants, charges for services, etc
Total income and surplus/deficit from the uploaded financial accounts	The figures you provide should match those in the group's approved annual accounts that you uploaded earlier as part of your application
Current unrestricted reserves and why they cannot be used for this project (maximum 2000 characters)	Unrestricted reserves are monies which are not restricted (usually by a donor or lender) for any particular use. If your group's unrestricted reserves cannot be used towards the project you are seeking a grant from SSE for, we will ask you to explain why.

Project budget

Question	Guidance to answer question
Please provide an accurate list of all costs involved in the work, services, or items required for the project. This should include any project costs that you are not requesting a grant towards.	You will be able to select one of two option to add your project cost detail. • Insert the information into a list/ table in the form • If you enter costs in the list / table option, these will automatically be totalled. OR • Upload your own budget template. • If you choose to upload a budget file, enter the total project cost (as stated in the file) into the box provided.
Please explain how you have costed the project. (maximum 1500 characters)	• For larger capital items (e.g. building work, vehicles, equipment) of more than £2,500 in value we expect you to have sought at least two quotations, for such items of more than £10,000 in value we expect you to have sought at least three quotations. Please upload any quotations you have received towards such costs. • If it has not been possible to get this number of quotes, please explain the reasons why • If you are seeking a grant to cover salary costs, please tell us what hourly rate will be paid. SSEN Transmission is a Living Wage Friendly Funder; therefore, we require any roles paid for through our funding to meet or exceed the Living Wage.
Tell us how much you are applying to the Strategic Investment Fund for.	Only non-recoverable VAT costs should be included in any grant amount you are requesting from SSE.
Who are the project funders?	If your total project cost requires other funding (including where your organisation is contributing its own funds), you will be asked to list all of the other funding sources, including the amounts being applied for and whether this funding is confirmed.

Checklist

We will ask you to tick yes, no or not applicable to the following checklist:

- That the group has the appropriate procedures in place to carry out your project safely
- That the group has at least three unrelated people serving on its management committee / board.
- That the project doesn't require retrospective funding
- That, if requested, you can provide the details of an independent referee.
- That any salaries are paid at, or greater than, the Living Wage
- Whether the project requires your group to secure permissions, such as planning permission, a building warrant and/or listed buildings consent, prior to starting work. If it does, tell us whether these have been applied for / granted. If they haven't been applied for or granted yet, tell us when you expect this to happen.

Submitting the form

Your draft application will save at key points, so you can log out of the portal and resume drafting at a later date.

To continue drafting, click the 'Continue Existing Application' link on the fund homepage, click the 'My Applications' button on the home screen, and then 'launch' next to your draft application.

If you have any problems in accessing or completing the application form, please contact us on the details below. You can also read our dedicated SSE Community Investment Portal FAQ section.

Once you have completed your application form, press the submit button. A copy of your application form will be saved in your 'My Applications' section of the portal.

FAQs

How were the fund themes identified?

The themes, priories and criteria of this fund have been shaped through two consultations with the public and stakeholders which took place in 2023 and 2026.

How are funding decisions made?

Funding decisions are made by an independent panel. The panel is made up of four independent panellists and one SSEN Transmission representative.

Panellists are selected through an open recruitment process, and all have a record in supporting communities and local people.

The Chair of the panel is Peter Peacock, former Scottish Government Minister and Convenor of Highland Council. The remaining panel members are:

- Louisa Macdonell (Vice Chair)
- Lucy Conway
- Nicholas Gubbins
- Christianna Logan (SSEN Transmission representative)

Can you apply for this fund if you have already applied for an SSE Renewables, other SSEN Transmission, or other SSE Community Benefit Fund?

Yes – all funds are separate. Therefore, you can still apply for this fund if you have previously applied for, or are currently in the process of applying for, any other Community Benefit Fund.

What questions will I need to answer as part of my application?

As part of your application, you will need to answer a series of questions designed to help us understand your project and its potential impact. To assist you in preparing, we have provided a document that outlines all the questions you will encounter in the online application process.

We encourage applicants to familiarise themselves with these questions and prepare their answers in advance to ensure a smooth and efficient application experience. You can access the questions in this document to review the application and begin your preparation.

Taking the time to thoroughly prepare your responses will help us better evaluate your project and its alignment with our funding goals.

How do we find out which applications were successful?

All organisations who apply will be contacted in March 2027 to advise whether your application has been successful. You will also be able to track the status of your application on the Community Investment Portal.

Who can I contact for advice and support?

For advice and support contact Felix Spittal, Community Investment Manager at felix.spittal@sse.com

If you have any problems in accessing or completing the application form using the Community Investment Portal, please contact communityfundadmin@sse.com. You can also read our dedicated SSE Community Investment Portal FAQ section.