

Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines for Renewable Energy and Transmission Projects

September 2025





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Acknowledgment of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge and respect Victoria’s 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. We are committed to genuinely partnering and meaningfully engaging with Victoria’s Traditional Owners and First Peoples to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



Explanatory note and consultation notice

These draft guidelines detail the minimum expectations of renewable energy and transmission project developers when engaging and creating social value and economic benefits for communities, Traditional Owners and landholders in Victoria. They build on the 2021 Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development in Victoria: A guide for renewable energy developers.

These draft guidelines have been designed to support consultation and invite feedback for consideration prior to the publication of the final guidelines in late 2025.

VicGrid, on behalf of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), is undertaking consultation to ensure guidance on community engagement and sharing of economic and social benefits is fit-for-purpose for the Victorian Access Regime and transmission procurement processes.

Questions appear in each section to prompt your thinking on key areas. A full list of consultation questions is provided in the section below.

Additionally, these draft guidelines include case studies that demonstrate exemplary practice in how projects deliver engagement, share economic benefits and create social value. We invite examples of existing projects that showcase best practice for inclusion in the final guidelines.

Your feedback will be taken into account as we prepare the final guidelines, which are expected to be published later in 2025 alongside additional information about participating in the Victorian Access Regime.

Victorian Access Regime

The Victorian Government is setting new rules to manage how renewable energy projects gain access to the state's transmission network. The new approach, known as the **Victorian Access Regime**, aims to encourage development in renewable energy zones and give developers more confidence they can supply energy into the market. The regime will increase transparency about what projects must do to gain access, including expectations to engage with and deliver benefits to landholders, communities and Traditional Owners.

Eligible projects inside a declared renewable energy zone will be required to apply for and receive a renewable energy scheme authority (a licence) before they can connect. All other projects, both inside and outside of a declared renewable energy zone, will be required to apply for a grid impact authority before they can receive an offer to connect to the transmission network.

How to participate in this consultation:

VicGrid invites written submissions from interested persons on the issues identified in this paper.

To take part in the consultation:

- upload a submission via Engage Victoria at **engage.vic.gov.au/victorian-access-regime**
- email a submission to vicgrid@deeca.vic.gov.au
- send a written submission to
VicGrid, GPO Box 527, Melbourne VIC 3001.

**Submissions close at 11:59pm (AEST)
on Wednesday 5 November 2025.**

Before making a submission, please read and take note of VicGrid's privacy collection statement at **engage.vic.gov.au/victorian-access-regime**

Please note, all submissions will be treated as public documents and will be published online unless clearly identified as being confidential. Submissions are encouraged to be made on a publicly available basis.

Submissions received after the closing date and time may not be acknowledged or considered in the design of the final guidelines, however where possible VicGrid will consider late submissions in any future updates to the guidelines. Any late submissions should explain the reason for lateness and the detriment to you if VicGrid does not consider your submission.

Consultation questions

We have included the following questions throughout the sections of these draft guidelines for your consideration in preparing a submission.

- Do you think the proposed guidelines will help create social value and economic benefits for communities, Traditional Owners and landholders?
- Of the proposed requirements on project developers, what are the most important requirements for you?
- How prescriptive should the guidelines be in formalising agreements and the timing of those agreements with communities?
- Should the guidelines provide guidance on the valuation of or budgeting for social value and economic benefit initiatives? If so, what amount or range should be considered for solar, wind and large-scale battery projects (expressed in dollars per megawatt)?
- Do you have examples of project developers and community working together to share information, coordinate engagement, and scale impact in social value and economic benefits?
- Do you have comments on how VicGrid should assess projects against the outcomes and expectations detailed in these draft guidelines?

Introduction

Ensuring Victorians have a voice through the energy transition

Victoria is moving away from ageing coal-fired power stations to cheaper renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar. This change is bringing unprecedented new investment in renewable energy generation, transmission and storage projects.

While the move to renewable energy can provide economic growth opportunities for communities, local businesses and industries, it also presents challenges and impacts.

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that Traditional Owners, local communities and landholders have a genuine say in the planning and development of renewable energy and transmission projects, thereby guiding better decision-making and achieving real, lasting benefits from their development.

About these guidelines

These guidelines set the Victorian Government's minimum expectations for how renewable energy and transmission developers engage with and create social value and economic benefits for communities, Traditional Owners, landholders and neighbours through their projects in Victoria.

Community engagement definition: The process through which a developer builds meaningful relationships with Traditional Owners, local communities and landholders to shape the development of a renewable energy or transmission project. It is a general term used to refer to various engagement approaches, including communication, consultation, participation and co-development. Approaches vary depending on the context, history and priorities of each community.

Social value and economic benefit creation definition: The positive social and economic outcomes that a project can create by investing in communities, Traditional Owners and landholders. A project developer can drive social and economic development through a program of initiatives. Initiatives can take various forms, including investments in local infrastructure, community projects, community capacity building, community benefit funds or collaborative projects. Section 3 provides further examples of possible initiatives.

What these guidelines mean for:

Communities, Traditional Owners and landholders

More agency in shaping how the energy transition impacts them and benefits their communities. This is especially important in contrast to the practice of providing inadequate benefit programs with little input from the community.

Project developers

Greater clarity of government expectations for community engagement and creating social value and economic benefits, along with increased accountability to deliver on their commitments.

The Victorian Government

A framework for defining outcomes and minimum expectations regarding engagement and the creation of social value and economic benefits, by which the government can measure, evaluate and monitor developer performance.

Who should use these guidelines

Developers of energy projects, such as wind, solar and large-scale batteries, seeking to connect to the transmission network

The new Victorian Access Regime will be implemented and administered by VicGrid. Under the new regime, a developer seeking to connect to Victoria's transmission network – known as the declared shared network (DSN) – will need to apply for access. Through the new application process, developers will be required to demonstrate how they meet the expectations in these guidelines.

VicGrid will monitor and enforce compliance through the renewable energy zone scheme authorities and grid impact authorities. Failure to comply with the conditions may result in the potential for access to be revoked or penalties to apply.

Transmission developers tendering and approved to partner with VicGrid to deliver transmission projects as part of the declared shared network

Through its procurement of transmission delivery partners, VicGrid will require partners to comply with these guidelines where relevant, alongside other relevant government policies, such as the Local Jobs First Policy and Social Procurement Framework, which VicGrid will detail in project-specific tender documents.

How these guidelines have evolved

Initially published in 2021, these guidelines are being revised to address the evolving needs of the Victorian energy landscape. In response to community and industry feedback, the revisions aim to provide clearer guidance on engagement and the design and delivery of social and economic benefits.

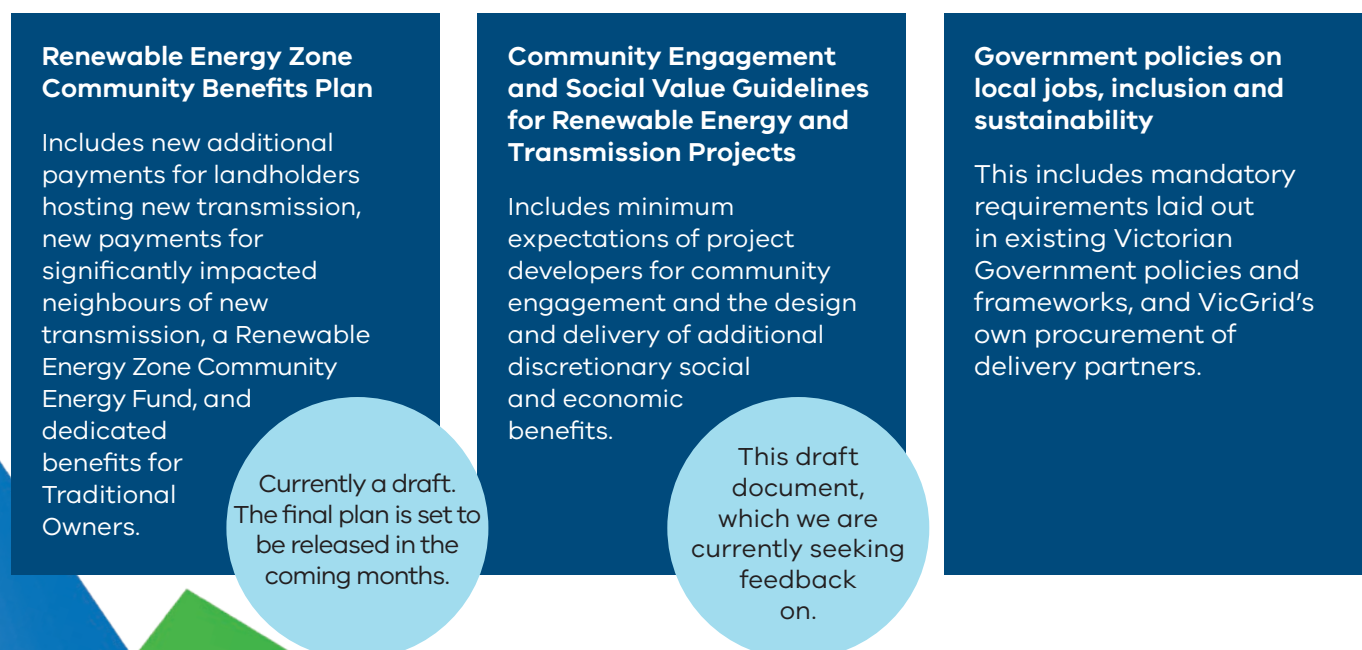
Once updated, these guidelines will be a vital element of the new Victorian Access Regime, which will ensure project developers meet the Victorian Government's minimum expectations for engagement and the creation of social value and economic benefits.

Additionally, the guidelines, along with the processes for allocating access to the grid and procuring transmission delivery partners, are designed to encourage developers to go beyond the minimum expectations to ensure the social value and economic benefits created by their projects have a lasting impact on Traditional Owners, communities and landholders.

It is expected that these guidelines will be updated at regular intervals to reflect changes in industry practice, community expectations and the regulatory environment.

To note, these guidelines are one component of the Victorian Government's broader approach for driving the creation of social value and economic benefits through the energy transition. For details, see Figure 1.

Figure 1: The ways the Victorian Government is driving the creation of social value and economic benefits through the energy transition



Using these guidelines

An overview of each section

Section 1 sets out expectations for how project developers will engage with the community and landholders.

Section 2 sets out expectations for how project developers will recognise the rights of Traditional Owners and form respectful, collaborative relationships with Traditional Owners.

Section 3 sets out expectations for how project developers will develop and deliver long term social value and economic benefit initiatives.

Section 4 sets out the documents that the Victorian Government expects to receive, what they will contain as a minimum, and where to find more guidance, if needed.

Policy context and industry standards

Legislation and policy

Existing policies and legislation require a range of activities relevant to community engagement and the creation of social value and economic benefit from generation and transmission developers. Different legislation and policies will apply to projects in different ways and at different stages.

Project developers should give consideration to the following policies and legislation in the development and delivery of their approaches:

- *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Environment Effects Act 1978*
- Essential Services Commission (2024) **Land Access Code of Practice**
- *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986*
- *Native Title Act 1993*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act*
- *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*

Best practice and industry standards

These guidelines have been developed to guide best practice. They build on existing industry-recognised guidelines and standards listed below. Developers should refer to these relevant resources during planning.

Government resources

- Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (2022) **Commissioner's Observations and Recommendations (updated)**
- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2025) **Managing the biodiversity impacts of renewable energy – guidance and draft handbook**
- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2025) **Traditional Owner and Aboriginal Community Engagement Framework**
- Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council (2024) **National Guidelines: Community Engagement and Benefits for Electricity Transmission Projects**
- Regional Development Victoria's Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS)

First Peoples resources

- First Nations Clean Energy Network (November 2022) **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Best Practice Principles for Clean Energy Projects**
- First Nations Clean Energy Network, Clean Energy Council, KPMG (2023) **Leading Practice Principles: First Nations and Renewable Energy Projects**
- The Energy Charter (2024) **First Nations Better Practice Community Engagement Toolkit**
- Traditional Owner Corporation documentation such as Whole of Country Plans, organisational strategies, engagement, benefit sharing and negotiation protocols, and renewable energy statements/strategies/plans

Community resources

- Community Power Agency (2025) **Guide to Regional Benefit Sharing**
- Country Fire Authority (2023) **CFA Design Guidelines and Model Requirements for Renewable Energy Facilities, v4**
- Country Fire Authority (2025) **CFA Fire Safety Studies for Battery Energy Storage Systems Guidelines, v1**
- Renewable Energy Alliance (2025) **Refurbishment, repowering or retirement. What happens when renewables approach end of life?**

Industry resources

- Clean Energy Council (2019) **A Guide to Benefit Sharing Options for Renewable Energy Projects**
- Infrastructure Sustainability Council (2023) **Legacies that last: Creating social value through Australia's infrastructure and built environment**
- The Energy Charter (2023) **Better Practice Social Licence Guideline: Co-existence and shared value opportunities for transmission and agricultural landholders**

International Association of Public Participation resources

- **Public participation spectrum**
- **Core values**
- **Quality assurance standards**

Key terms used in these guidelines

The table below provides plain English definitions of key terms commonly used in these guidelines. These definitions are to ensure consistency and clarity in the application of these key terms and to promote a shared understanding.

Table A: Definitions of key terms

Term	Definition
Declared shared network (DSN)	The interconnected high-voltage powerlines and shared terminal stations that transport large amounts of electricity from where it is generated to where it is needed across Victoria. The DSN is often referred to in this document as the 'transmission network'.
First Peoples	First Peoples or First Nations people refers to peoples or nations of people connected to an area prior to colonisation. These terms have some general acceptance but may not be the term preferred by individuals or specific groups of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Grid Impact Assessment	The process under the Victorian Access Regime that applies to proposed connections to the DSN outside a renewable energy zone, and those within a renewable energy zone but not of a technology listed in the associated renewable energy zone scheme.
Project developer	A company developing a renewable energy generation, storage, connection or transmission project.
Registered Aboriginal Party	Under the <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i> (Vic), Registered Aboriginal Parties are appointed by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council. They are the primary custodians and keepers of Indigenous ecological knowledge, and are responsible for protecting and managing Aboriginal cultural heritage.
Renewable energy project	Renewable energy generation and storage projects, including private transmission and connection assets, needed to connect the generation or storage project to the shared network.
Renewable energy zone	An area declared in a renewable energy zone Order, and where a renewable energy zone access scheme and special benefits arrangements will apply.
Renewable energy zone access scheme	The arrangements governing network connections for new renewable generation and storage projects located in a renewable energy zone.
Social performance	How well a project developer is delivering on community expectations for social, environmental and economic value.
Traditional Owners	An Aboriginal person who has traditional connections to an identified geographical area of Country. Traditional Owners may or may not have formal recognition under relevant Victorian and Commonwealth legislation.
Transmission project	New transmission infrastructure under development that is considered part of the declared shared network.
Victorian Access Regime	The proposed set of rules for how new generation projects can connect to the declared shared network. This includes renewable energy zone access schemes and the Grid Impact Assessment.

Expected engagement outcomes

These draft guidelines propose minimum expectations for how energy generation and transmission projects should engage and create economic and social value. The guidelines have been informed by feedback from communities, Traditional Owners and landholders about what is important to them.

The minimum expectations have been designed to promote the delivery of the following outcomes. These outcomes will vary in appearance, and the extent to which they are achieved will be different for each group: Traditional Owners, landholders, neighbours and the community. These differences reflect the extent of impact and interest in individual projects.

Project developers will be required to deliver on the minimum expectations and will also have their performance assessed against these outcomes.

Consultation questions:



Q. Do you think the proposed guidelines will help create social value and economic benefits for communities, Traditional Owners and landholders?

Q. Of the proposed requirements on project developers, what are the most important requirements for you?



Table B: Expected engagement outcomes

Outcome	Description
Stronger, longer-term relationships	Establishing early and ongoing dialogue and building empathetic relationships between stakeholders leads to mutual respect and understanding, paving the way for more collaboration.
Enhanced knowledge sharing	Through forming partnerships with communities, Traditional Owners and landholders a greater exchange of knowledge and expertise benefits all parties involved and leads to better project outcomes.
Increased participation	Engagement opportunities that are diverse and meet community needs encourage greater participation in discussions, ensuring a wide range of voices and perspectives are heard and considered.
Informed decision-making	Timely and transparent information enables the community, Traditional Owners and landholders to have a clear understanding of projects, leading to better-informed feedback and decisions during project planning and delivery.
Tailored solutions	Projects address specific local needs and concerns, resulting in developments that are beneficial and relevant to community and Country and minimise negative impacts.
Effective communication	Effective communication leads to a better understanding of the project and associated processes. This includes a well-established process for enquiries, complaints management and dispute resolution, allowing community members to raise questions, concerns and resolve issues effectively and in a timely way.
Risk mitigation	Addressing local concerns regarding environmental hazards, such as fire risks and flooding, helps communities to feel safer and more secure about the development.
Fair and transparent negotiations	Transparent and fair negotiations between project developers, landholders and neighbours give all parties clearer insights into the terms and benefits. They can discuss them openly with each other, which enhances collective understanding and cohesion.
Empowerment and self-determination	Traditional Owners have a stronger voice in the decision-making processes that affect them, Country and community, leading to greater agency and control over their cultural heritage and land management.
Equitable relationships between developers, community, Traditional Owners and landholders	Community, Traditional Owners and landholders are empowered to make decisions that are in their best interest and are provided assurance regarding developer accountabilities and the long-term impacts of projects on community and Country.
Increased collaboration and collective impact of social and economic benefit opportunities	Collaboration and partnerships between project developers and other organisations to improve coordination of engagement, enhance knowledge sharing, increase the collective impact of social and economic benefits and better manage cumulative impacts.

Section 1

Engagement expectations

This section sets out expectations for how project developers will engage with the community, landholders and neighbours.

Effective, considered community engagement is fundamental to community support for renewable energy development projects and is expected by Victorian communities.

Defining your project's community

The Victorian Government expects developers to engage with the following groups, at a minimum:

- communities surrounding the project
- host landholders
- neighbouring and nearby landholders
- Traditional Owners.

The following sub-sections detail the minimum requirements for each of these groups, aside from Traditional Owners. For details on Traditional Owner engagement, see Section 2.

Engaging with communities surrounding the project

Communities are the people who live and work within, and identify with, the geographic area surrounding a proposed renewable energy project. They also include organisations and peak bodies that represent community interests and needs.

Developers are expected to identify the groups and stakeholders making up their project's surrounding community as part of engagement planning. Project developers should engage the following groups at a minimum:

- communities surrounding the project, including First Peoples communities, culturally and linguistically diverse groups and other diverse community cohorts
- cross-organisation and government partnerships
- civic and representative groups
- local government
- governance bodies of Renewable Energy Zone Community Energy Funds¹
- Country Fire Authority brigades
- commercial fishing and other marine users in the context of offshore wind.

¹ Subject to the draft Renewable Energy Zone Community Benefits Plan being finalised and released later this year





Minimum expectations for engaging with communities surrounding the project

Developers must demonstrate how they are meeting the following Victorian Government expectations when engaging with communities.

- Engage early in the planning process, before the submission of planning permit applications.
- Integrate community feedback, concerns and interests into project development and plans for creating social value and economic benefits.
- Provide diverse, regular and ongoing engagement opportunities.
- Establish a regional presence with locally accessible engagement staff.
- Provide transparent information about the project's negotiables and non-negotiables, as well as the role of consultation.
- Tailor engagement for local context, priorities and needs.
- Respond to community concerns about environmental hazards, particularly fire risks, flooding and biosecurity.
- Establish processes for enquiries, complaints management and dispute resolution.
- Ensure that communities know how their contributions have been used to influence outcomes.

The International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2s) Spectrum of Public Participation (see Appendix A) is an industry-recognised tool that can support developers in determining the role of consultation.

Engaging local government

The Victorian Government considers it best practice for developers of renewable energy generation and transmission projects to engage with local government on project planning and initiatives that deliver social and economic benefits.

Engaging local government is important because:

- Local governments can facilitate engagement, helping developers connect with key local stakeholders and contributing local context to the design of community benefit initiatives.
- Councils can advocate for local priorities and help ensure that developments contribute meaningfully to more strategic and regionally significant initiatives, and deliver broader social outcomes such as economic participation, equity and long-term regional resilience.
- Local governments have land-use planning roles related to residential land, workforce housing and industrial land.
- The Minister for Planning provides local governments with the opportunity to comment on and make recommendations to the Minister regarding applications.
- Local governments are generally responsible for enforcing planning permit conditions, even if the Minister for Planning issued the permit.

Case study:

The Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Energy Collaboration

The Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Energy Collaboration is hosted by Wimmera Southern Mallee Development with councils, Traditional Owner partners, local businesses and energy proponents, and supported by The Energy Charter.

The collaboration brings industry, community and local government to one table to drive economic development across the Wimmera Southern Mallee and ensure the region benefits from the energy transition. Through a 6-month co-design process, partners agreed a Collaboration Framework and are delivering Collective Action Projects.

Current workstreams include research and development, fire safety and response, workforce development and youth career pathways, and local energy constraints and opportunities.

By working together, energy organisations are focused on minimising impacts on farming and neighbours, improving collective engagement and information sharing, coordinating delivery of community benefits with councils and community groups, and strengthening transparency and accountability through a public Commitments Register that tracks what is promised and delivered. Wimmera Southern Mallee Development hosts the collaboration and tracks commitments. It does not allocate company benefits or advocate for any project.



Engaging with host landholders

Host landholders play a crucial role in the energy transition. Host landholders, in the context of these guidelines, are those who host generation and transmission infrastructure (private or as part of the transmission network).

The expectations in this section apply to all host landholder negotiations and agreements related to hosting generation infrastructure, transmission line easements, construction access and road access.

Developer requirements and landholder rights can vary by project type and are subject to various legislation and regulations. These guidelines are designed to complement legislation and regulations that govern engagement and contractual arrangements between developers and landholders, such as the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986*.

Minimum expectations for host landholder engagement

Developers must demonstrate how they are meeting the following Victorian Government expectations when engaging with landholders.

- Negotiate fair and reasonable commercial agreements for hosting renewable energy and transmission projects.
- Negotiate transparently with and between landholders.
- Promote transparency and open communication by preventing contractual clauses from unfairly restricting landholders from discussing agreement terms with other community members.
- Allow adequate time for consideration of commercial agreements.
- Cover reasonable costs incurred by landholders in accessing independent legal, financial, tax and insurance advice before entering into any agreement.
- Provide timely and transparent information about key project features and potential impacts to enable landholders to make informed contributions and decisions about the project design and how impacts are managed.
- Ensure preliminary commercial agreements do not place long-term obligations on landholders beyond what was originally intended. For example, preliminary licence agreements should not commit landholders to host the infrastructure.
- Ensure agreements are clear and fair regarding renewals or extensions, and include provisions that allow landholders to terminate the agreement for valid reasons once the agreed-upon term has ended.
- Clarify who is responsible for paying increased costs or new costs associated with hosting the infrastructure, such as insurance premiums, rates, levies, land taxes or duties.
- Specify the developer's responsibilities and commitments on decommissioning, remediation and any other end-of-life arrangements through host landholder agreements. This process should include negotiation of landholder protections and financial safeguards.

Engaging with neighbours and nearby landholders

The Victorian Government recognises that neighbouring and nearby landholders can be impacted by generation and transmission infrastructure. Engaging with neighbouring and nearby landholders early can mean increased opportunities to minimise impacts through project design and identify appropriate mitigations for unavoidable impacts.

Minimum expectations for neighbouring and nearby landholder engagement

Developers must demonstrate how they are meeting the following Victorian Government expectations when engaging with neighbouring and nearby landholders.

- Provide timely and transparent information about project details to enable informed participation in discussions about impacts and risks.
- Consult with neighbouring and nearby landholders on the impacts and risks (environmental, physical or operational) and the ways to minimise, mitigate and manage them.
- Seek to address risks and concerns, including those relating to amenity and land use, raised by neighbours and nearby landholders in the design and delivery of the project.
- Consult with neighbouring landholders on addressing insurance matters, and provide transparent information on any perceived or potential implications and risks.
- Inform neighbours about planning scheme requirements and discuss any implications and impacts.
- Consider offering to develop agreements with neighbours that outline how impacts will be managed and provide certainty about benefits.
- Engage with neighbours to determine an appropriate methodology for developing neighbour agreements or benefits.
- Consider sourcing neighbour goods and services.



The Victorian Government is aware of landholders' concerns about public liability insurance risk. We are currently developing options to address this issue. Additional guidance may be incorporated into the final guidelines following targeted stakeholder consultation. Developers may be required to take additional actions.

Developer Rating Scheme

The Commonwealth Government is in the process of establishing a Developer Rating Scheme for renewable energy developers, as recommended by the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's 2024 Community Engagement Review.

The voluntary scheme aims to improve industry standards and provide local communities with greater transparency about companies that are proposing renewable energy and transmission projects in their area.

When the Developer Rating Scheme comes into effect, VicGrid will consult with developers to discuss the scheme's requirements, with the aim of encouraging developers to provide the rating information where practicable for their respective projects.

Case study:

Supporting neighbours and local businesses at the Mortlake South Wind Farm

The Mortlake South Wind Farm Neighbourhood Benefit Program was the first of its kind in the industry, offering a unique method to distribute the economic benefits of the wind farm as broadly as possible.

The program is aimed at eligible households located within 4 km of a wind turbine. Pre-loaded EFTPOS cards (between the value of \$500 – \$2000, proximity dependent) are distributed on an annual basis. The cards can be used to purchase goods and services at local participating businesses, within Mortlake, Noorat and Terang.

During the anticipated 10-year lifespan of the program, the expected cumulative investment will total more than a million dollars. This funding is being directly reinvested back into local businesses through the Neighbourhood Benefit Cards while providing ongoing support to neighbouring households.



Section 2

Engaging with Traditional Owners

Traditional Owners have distinct rights and responsibilities for Country. All partnerships and engagement activities should be carried out in a meaningful and culturally safe way so they can shape, participate in and benefit from the renewable energy transition, as determined by them.

This section sets out minimum expectations for how project developers will recognise the rights of Traditional Owners and engage respectfully and genuinely. We are proposing these expectations based on feedback we have heard through engagement with Traditional Owners.

Traditional Owners may hold their own expectations of project developers, which may be expressed through renewable energy strategies, statements and dialogue. It is up to Traditional Owners to determine whether, how and at what level they wish to engage with developers.

Rights of Traditional Owners

Traditional Owners' cultural and legal rights must be upheld under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, and the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). Furthermore, Article 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples describes the rights of Indigenous peoples in relation to developments affecting their lands or resources.

Registered Aboriginal Parties are responsible for managing and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage within their appointed areas under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic), including carrying out duties such as the review and approval of Cultural Heritage Management Plans and Cultural Heritage Permits. Where proposed projects overlap with areas where rights exist under the *Native Title Act 1993* or the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, Traditional Owners may hold procedural rights and rights to compensation. Project developers must address these rights before a project may proceed. These rights are separate from any social and economic benefit initiatives expected in these guidelines.

Project developers should negotiate with Traditional Owners as rights holders, establishing a dialogue between equal parties to address concerns and interests, arrive at solutions or come to an agreement that all parties are satisfied with.

Minimum expectations for Traditional Owner engagement

Project developers must demonstrate how they are meeting the following expectations when engaging with Traditional Owners.

- Research the rights, interests, aspirations and protocols of Traditional Owner groups as expressed through Whole of Country Plans, organisational strategies, renewable energy statements, and engagement protocols.
- Undertake cultural safety training and education appropriate to the Traditional Owners on whose lands the project is intended to be developed.
- Engage early to understand the level of engagement, collaboration and participation that Traditional Owners seek. Engage broadly, including with non-formally recognised Traditional Owners who assert rights and interests in the area.
- Recognise and uphold the legislated rights of Traditional Owners.
- Enable self-determination by placing Traditional Owners at the centre of decision-making on issues that affect their lives, including cultural heritage, caring for Country, and social and economic initiatives.
- Establish a dialogue with Traditional Owners to understand and address concerns and interests, arrive at solutions or come to an agreement that all parties are satisfied with.
- Engage in dialogue on non-tangible cultural heritage and values.
- Undertake engagement and knowledge sharing with Traditional Owners in alignment with principles of data sovereignty.
- Appropriate remuneration for engaging Traditional Owners for their contribution of knowledge, expertise and time.
- Explore opportunities with the Traditional Owner representative bodies for collaboration on social value and economic benefits within broader First Peoples communities, including local community-controlled organisations, chambers of commerce, health organisations, support services or education, training and employment providers.

Section 3

Creating social value and economic benefits

Social value and economic benefits in renewable energy projects are created by investing in communities, Traditional Owners and landholders. They are delivered through a program of initiatives and supporting local economic development. Initiatives can take various forms, including investments in local infrastructure, community projects, community capacity building, community benefit funds or collaborative projects.

Delivering social value and economic benefit initiatives

This section sets out expectations for how project developers will develop and deliver initiatives that contribute to long-term social value creation and economic benefits for local communities.

Determining the reach of social value and economic benefits

Project developers should consider to whom and how far their social value and economic benefits should extend. To determine this, developers should consult on the needs and priorities of the communities where the project is proposed and consider the scale, impact and nature of the initiatives.

Developers should consider the various levels of geographic and social communities relating to a particular area. Initiatives may be designed for landholders immediately adjacent to a renewable energy project, the neighbouring townships and population centres, and/or the broader region in which the project is being developed. In the context of offshore wind development, consideration needs to be given to commercial fishing and other marine users.

Minimum expectations for creating social value and economic benefits

Developers must demonstrate how they are meeting the following expectations in the design and delivery of social value and economic benefits.

- Design initiatives that deliver strategic or long-term social value and economic benefits for the community.
- Develop community capacity by identifying opportunities that build on local strengths, assets, capabilities and resources.
- Align benefits with the needs, priorities and strategies already identified by local communities, government, industry and research.
- Collaborate with industry and community to achieve collective impact, including coordinating on resourcing, initiatives, information sharing and engagement, and leveraging shared networks.
- Provide transparent information to the community about the project's social value and economic benefit commitments, including by publishing a Social Value and Economic Benefits Plan.

Consultation question:

Q. How prescriptive should the guidelines be in formalising agreements and the timing of those agreements with communities?



Examples of social value and economic benefit initiatives

A project developer's social value and economic benefits program may include the following types of initiatives.

- **Community energy initiatives:** supporting initiatives that improve energy affordability, efficiency, reliability, access and resilience.
- **Community-owned energy investments:** designing co-ownership schemes that enable community members to invest in renewable energy projects.
- **Community infrastructure:** contributing to building community resilience through investment in housing, healthcare, recreational or other legacy infrastructure.
- **Community benefit funds:** delivering grants, sponsorships or donations to community organisations.
- **Caring for Country, biodiversity and climate:** supporting Traditional Owners and community projects to care for Country, protect and restore ecosystems and biodiversity, and support community climate action initiatives.
- **Skilled and professional services:** providing pro bono or discounted technical skills and expertise for community projects, including engineering, planning, business cases and feasibility studies.
- **Community capability and capacity building:** support community capacity and resourcing in areas such as local leadership, community planning and organising, emergency response, volunteerism, energy literacy, collaboration, governance and innovation.

Consultation question:

Q. Do you have examples of project developers and community working together to share information, coordinate engagement, and scale impact in social value and economic benefits?



Existing compensation, fees and rates

The social value and economic benefits initiatives developed under these guidelines are in addition to, not in place of, the following statutory compensation, mandatory fee or rates payments:

- Compensation payments to landholders under the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986*.
- Compensation arrangements for Traditional Owners under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* and the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth).
- Cultural heritage works and management plans contracted to fulfil obligations under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.
- Access fees paid from renewable energy zone generation projects that have been applied to Renewable Energy Zone Community Energy Funds and Traditional Owner benefits².
- Transmission easement fees paid by transmission network service providers that have been applied to Renewable Energy Zone Community Energy Funds and Traditional Owner benefits³.
- Payments in Lieu of Rates (PiLoR) stipulated by or negotiated under the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* and the guidelines stipulated in the Order in Council under Section 94, published in the Government Gazette Issue G9, 29 February 2024.
- Negotiated outcomes where fishing operations are materially affected under the *Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021*.

² Subject to the draft Renewable Energy Zone Community Benefits Plan being finalised and released later this year

³ Subject to the draft Renewable Energy Zone Community Benefits Plan being finalised and released later this year

Determining an appropriate budget for social value and economic initiatives

Developers will need to determine an appropriate budget for the social value and economic benefits initiatives.

There is no prescriptive model for developing this budget.

The budget may depend on various factors such as the technology type, scale, local context, community interests and commercial considerations. Some initiatives may also take the form of in-kind contributions through skilled volunteerism and technical assistance.

The value of the initiatives should exclude project expenditure that a development would need to incur to receive approvals and run its operations. These may include engagement activities, mandatory fees, compensation or upgrades and repairs to infrastructure, such as road upgrades.

Consultation question:

Q. Should the guidelines provide guidance on the valuation of or budgeting for social value and economic benefit initiatives? If so, what amount or range should be considered for solar, wind, and large-scale battery projects (expressed in dollars per megawatt)?



For transmission project delivery partners

Social value and economic benefit budgets for state-procured transmission infrastructure will be determined in collaboration between a transmission developer and VicGrid project by project, according to the specific requirements, impacts and scale.

Since the 2021 *Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development* in Victoria guidelines were issued, industry practice on benefit sharing has evolved. In NSW, the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) has published updated guidance for community benefit sharing in renewable energy projects. These approaches are outlined in the table below. The final version of these guidelines may include similar such guidance for social value initiatives.

Table C: Examples of social value and economic benefit initiative budgeting guidance

Technology	DEECA (2021) Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Guidelines	DPHI (2024) Benefit-Sharing Guideline
Solar	\$130-\$800/MW/a	<\$850/MW/a
Wind	\$500-\$1,500/MW/a	<\$1,050/MW/a
Standalone battery energy storage systems (BESS)	N/A	<\$150/MW/a



Supporting local economic development

Supporting local industry is an important way projects can deliver social value and economic benefits. Local economic development is about growing the economic capacity of the communities where a project is located, particularly through local industry participation and workforce development.

This section sets out expectations for how project developers will engage local industries and workforces.

For transmission project delivery partners

Transmission infrastructure procured by the state will be required to apply all mandatory government policies, including but not limited to the Local Jobs First Policy and Social Procurement Framework, in delivering social value for their respective projects. Therefore, the relevant mandatory policies will supersede any guidance provided here.

Minimum expectations for local industry engagement

Developers must demonstrate how they are meeting the following expectations.

- Research local capabilities and identify opportunities for procuring local content.
- Engage engineering, procurement and construction contractors on local procurement opportunities.
- Identify social procurement and First Peoples' procurement opportunities.
- Communicate early with the community and relevant stakeholders about procurement and workforce opportunities that will be available at each stage of the development cycle.
- Support local suppliers' capacity to participate through collaboration and engagement activities, including with other developers.
- Collaborate with stakeholders on vocational education and business development programs.

Case study:

Industry collaboration to build an offshore wind workforce in Gippsland

Several offshore wind project developers are collaborating with the Gippsland community to support workers transitioning from coal-fired electricity generation and to provide career pathways for the next generation of energy workers.

Initiatives include:

- partnering with the Asia Pacific Renewable Energy Training Centre to establish a Gippsland campus at Federation University
- scholarships for energy-related studies through Federation University
- participation in the Jobs Victoria New Energy Project to help priority jobseekers gain work in the energy sector
- partnering to establish the Australian Renewables Academy to train and mentor renewable energy workers, and to advocate for workforce development in renewable energy
- publishing a series of jobs guides to engage workers and suppliers about workforce opportunities in offshore wind
- supporting the establishment of the Australian Centre for Offshore Wind Energy to Gippsland's workforce pipeline
- supporting the development of a Clean Energy Workforce Course Guide with TAFE Gippsland.

Local workforce development activity expectations

Local workforce development refers to a variety of activities aimed at building a renewable energy workforce in the community where the project is located.

Developers should describe any workforce development activities undertaken, whether as part of new or existing initiatives.

These may include:

- collaborating with secondary, vocational and tertiary education providers
- sharing information on career pathways and requirements
- supporting job-readiness and employment of priority and disadvantaged jobseekers
- planning and recruiting for inclusive workforces, including First Peoples employment
- providing support or scholarships for vocational and tertiary education students.

Social and First Peoples procurement expectations

Project developers should use their buying power to generate social impact above and beyond the value of the goods, services or construction being procured.

In planning for social procurement, developers should consider setting targets, designing accessible contract packages, engaging sub-contractors, designing accountability methods and building the capacity of social enterprise partners.

Developers can search the following directories to identify social enterprises, Victorian First Peoples businesses and disability enterprises:

- Social Traders
- Kinaway Chamber of Commerce
- Supply Nation
- BuyAbility
- Indigenous Business Australia
- Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations
- Industry Capability Network Victoria
- Relevant local First Peoples business and social procurement networks and directories

Section 4

Evidence and documentation

This section outlines the documents that the Victorian Government expects to receive from project developers applying to access the transmission network through the Victorian Access Regime, what they will contain as a minimum, and where to find more guidance, if needed.

For transmission project delivery partners

The documents you will need to prepare in line with these guidelines will be outlined in the project-specific tender documents.

As a state procurer of transmission projects and a party to public-private partnerships, VicGrid will ensure that transmission project developers are accountable for community engagement and social and economic benefit commitments made to communities affected by transmission projects. This includes publication of social and economic benefit commitments, social performance assessment during procurement, and social performance reporting through state economic development policy frameworks.

Documentation requirements

Projects applying to access the transmission network will have their social performance assessed on the design and delivery of their community engagement, social value and economic benefit initiatives.

As part of a renewable energy project's application, the following documents are required:

1. social impact assessment
2. community, landholder and Traditional Owner engagement strategies
3. social value and economic benefits program
4. local industry engagement plan
5. monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan.



Accountabilities and compliance

Where VicGrid grants access to the grid, project developers will receive an access authority. The commitments made in the submitted documents will inform the project's access authorisation conditions.

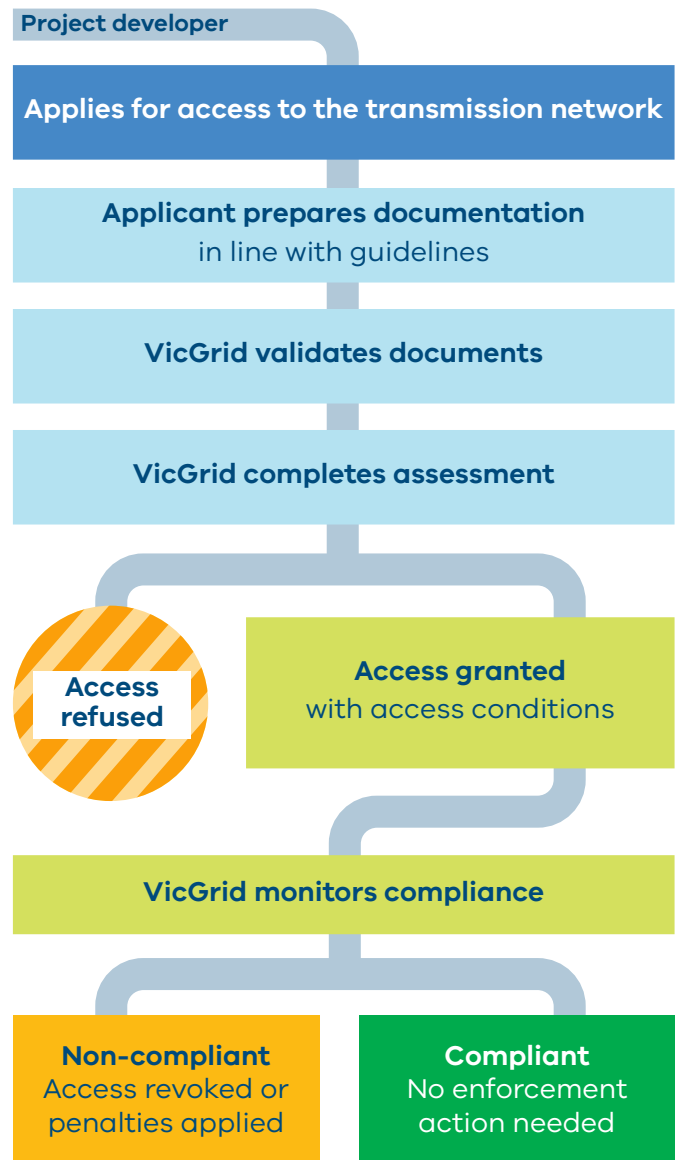
VicGrid may reject an application for an access authority (within or outside a renewable energy zone) if the applicant is unable to demonstrate that it has applied these guidelines in developing its application.

Access conditions are enforceable, and penalties may apply. An access authority can also be revoked if conditions are breached, for example, if the project is not meeting its community, landholder and Traditional Owner commitments. Before considering revocation of access or imposition of penalties, VicGrid will give notice to the project developer and consult with Traditional Owners and stakeholders. Compliance and enforcement of access conditions will be implemented through additional regulations under the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005*, and VicGrid will release further guidance on how they will be applied.

In assessing social performance, VicGrid will also reserve the right to verify the information submitted in documents, including consulting with community, Traditional Owners, landholders and local government. Should the process of verification invalidate evidence provided by project developers, VicGrid may refuse access to the grid.

Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of how project developers will be held accountable for commitments made to communities.

Figure 2:
Social performance accountability framework



Section 4: Evidence and documentation

Additional evidence of social performance

In addition to the required documents, developers may choose to provide relevant information from external sources regarding their company or project's social performance.

These may include:

- agreements, letters of support, letters of engagement, or other evidence of support provided by community organisations and local governments
- Infrastructure Sustainability Rating Scheme certifications
- Clean Energy Council Best Practice Charter signatory submissions and reports
- information relating to ratings obtained through the Commonwealth Government Developer Rating Scheme (upon commencement of the scheme)
- social value certifications, including B-Corp certification, Social Traders certification
- Reconciliation Action Plan, formally endorsed by Reconciliation Australia
- pre-assessment certificate issued by the Fair Jobs Code Unit.

Exemptions

To avoid duplication with other government social performance assessments, projects that have successfully tendered under the Commonwealth Government's Capacity Investment Scheme are exempt from submitting the required documentation on the proviso that those processes include requirements that are consistent with, or exceed, the expectations detailed in these guidelines.

VicGrid will undertake a comparison of assessment criteria and methodologies and check on the current status of the project. Any gaps are expected to be incorporated into conditions in the relevant access authority, unless major gaps are identified.

While these projects are exempt from repeated assessment of social performance, VicGrid may request the submission of documentation to verify developer commitments and monitor compliance where required.

Social performance assessments do not apply to existing projects or projects that are not required to apply for access under the Victorian Access Regime.

While existing projects are exempt from applying to access the grid, the expectations described in these guidelines should be understood as the minimum benchmark for community engagement and social value and economic benefit creation while in operation. Operators of existing projects are encouraged to review their approach for consistency with these guidelines.

Social impact assessment

What is a social impact assessment?

A social impact assessment is the process of analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of a project⁷.

The development of a social impact assessment should be considered as an iterative process, allowing community to identify impacts and support the development of mitigation and management responses.

Social impact assessment document requirements

A social impact assessment is intrinsically linked to community engagement approaches and the development of social value and economic benefits. As such it is expected that the documents are related and align.

In line with international and Australian social impact assessment guidance, it is expected that project developers include the information listed in Table D as part of the social impact assessment.

Additional resources:

More information on social impact assessments can be found in the International Association for Impact Assessment [Social Impact Assessment Guide](#).

New South Wales and Queensland have also developed social impact assessment guides that can provide additional guidance:

- [New South Wales Government Social Impact Assessment Guideline](#)
- [Queensland Government Social Impact Assessment Guideline](#)

Table D: Required information to be submitted in a social impact assessment

1. Community context and profile

- The methodology used (including desktop research and consultation)
- Description of relevant communities and regional characteristics
- Important community values (including social, cultural, natural and land use values)
- A baseline of current social conditions for project impacts to be measured against
- Summary of main issues

2. Community map

- Map(s) of the project location, geographical considerations, natural assets, Traditional Owner lands, LGAs, impacted facilities and infrastructure and landholders impacted.

3. Social impact stakeholder identification

- List of impacted stakeholders and rights holders

4. Identifying impacts

- List of likely direct and indirect social impacts (both positive and negative, real and perceived)

5. Evaluating impacts

- The extent, nature, duration and significance of each social impact in relation to the baseline of current conditions
- Analysis of who is impacted
- Likelihood of each impact occurring
- Cumulative impacts
- Potential alternatives

6. Documenting measures to address/manage impacts

- Identification of measures/actions to minimise, mitigate or manage negative impacts, including reference to how these will deliver against the outcomes and expectations listed in this guide
- Measures to enhance positive benefits and opportunities

7. Ongoing plans/next steps

- Details of additional assessment activities and consultation planned in relation to the social impact assessment.

⁷ Vanclay, F., Esteves, A. M., Aucamp, I., & Franks, D. (2015). Social impact assessment: Guidance for assessing and managing the social impacts of projects and ask projects to assess social impacts.

Community, landholder and Traditional Owner engagement strategies

What are engagement strategies?

A community, landholder and Traditional Owner engagement strategy communicates how the project developer will involve each of these groups in designing and developing the project. They clearly articulate objectives, stakeholders, activities, timelines, risks, roles and responsibilities and budget.

Additional resources:

The International Association of Public Participation [Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement](#) should be considered by developers as an essential tool in guiding the development of engagement plans.

Engagement strategies document requirements

A community, landholder and Traditional Owner engagement strategy must be prepared in line with the expectations as set out in Section 1 and 2 of these guidelines.

Separate strategies are required for:

- community, landholder and neighbour engagement
- Traditional Owner engagement.

Required information for community, landholder and Traditional Owner engagement strategies is presented in Table E.



Table E: Required information to be submitted in community, landholder and Traditional Owner engagement strategies

1. General

- Purpose and objectives of engagement
- Use of the IAP2 public participation spectrum (see Appendix A) to communicate commitment to engagement at various project stages and by stakeholder group
- Description of community considerations and interests in relation to the development
- Engagement negotiables and non-negotiables (relevant to project stages)
- How the outcomes and expectations listed in these guidelines will be delivered as they relate to community, Traditional Owners and landholders

2. Stakeholder identification

- Analysis of stakeholders and Traditional Owners, as identified in the Social Impact Assessment – with consideration for influence, impact and interests
- Details of Traditional Owner group(s) and First Peoples groups
- Description of Traditional Owner considerations and interests in relation to the development, including consideration of Traditional Owner Whole of Country Plans, organisational strategies, renewable energy statements and engagement protocols

3. Summary of stakeholder engagement completed to date

- Activities undertaken to date and community and landholder responses (positive and negative)
- Evidence of project responsiveness to key issues raised by community and landholders
- Activities undertaken to date to engage Traditional Owner group(s)
- Verification of Traditional Owner engagement, which may include agreements, letters of engagement, letters of support or other evidence

4. Planned communication and engagement approaches

- Details of project phases and engagement opportunities
- Details of planned activities, tools and channels for each key stakeholder group identified in these guidelines (and any others specific to the project)
- Key contact points and channels for the public, landholders and Traditional Owners
- Enquiries, complaints and dispute resolution systems and processes

5. Budget and resourcing

- Detail budget and resourcing for the delivery of the engagement plan, and associated activities
- Outline approach for ensuring sufficient and appropriately skilled delivery teams

Social value and economic benefits program

What is a social value and economic benefits program?

A social value and economic benefits program outlines how the project developer intends to create positive social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes for individuals, communities and regions.

Social value and economic benefits program document requirements

A social value and economic benefits program must be prepared in line with the minimum expectations of these guidelines.

Required information for a social value and economic benefits program is presented in Table F.

Table F: Required information to be submitted in a social value and economic benefits program

1. Program overview

- Overview of the approach to developing the initiatives (including the role of engagement)
- Community needs and aspirations (with consideration for social impact assessment outcomes)
- Summary of any engagement to date to inform initiatives

2. List of social and economic benefit initiatives

- Description of existing or planned community and landholder social value and economic benefit initiatives
- Description of Traditional Owner social value and economic benefit initiatives
- Indication of value (budget or in-kind)
- Description of beneficiaries and outcomes
- Status and timing of initiatives
- How they deliver against the expectations and outcomes listed in these guidelines

3. Governance

- Information on governance model(s), delivery and administration



Local industry engagement plan

What is a local industry engagement plan?

A local industry engagement plan describes the project developer's approach to providing opportunities for local businesses and workers.

Local industry engagement plan document requirements

A local industry engagement plan must align with the expectations set out in Section 3 of these guidelines. In preparing their plan, developers should consult with Regional Development Victoria before engaging local industry. Regional Development Victoria is the Victorian Government's lead agency responsible for rural and regional economic development.

Required information in a local industry engagement plan is presented in Table G.

Table G: Required information to be submitted in local industry engagement plan

1. Local industry consultation

- Description of identified local industry engagement opportunities
- Description on how local industry will be engaged on project supply opportunities (including any engagement to-date)

2. Local industry and workforce activities

- Details on local industry and workforce activities
- Details of any partnerships (existing or planned) to deliver local industry and workforce activities

3. Local industry commitments, and how they deliver against the expectations and outcomes described in these guidelines.

Initiatives may include:

- employing local workers
- procuring from local enterprises
- social procurement and First Peoples procurement
- inclusive workforce (for example, First Peoples workers, women workers, trainees, and apprentices).





Monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan

What is a monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan?

Monitoring and evaluating community engagement, social value and economic benefits, and local industry participation throughout the project's lifecycle identifies where success has been achieved and where improvements and or modifications need to be made.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan document requirements

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting plans should be regularly reviewed and updated in line with any changes to the community, landholder and Traditional Owner engagement strategy, and the social and economic benefits program.

Required information for a monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan is presented in Table H.

Table H: Required information for a monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan

1. Methodology

- Description of monitoring and evaluation framework
- Description of the measures and tools
- Outline the role of engagement in monitoring and evaluation activities
- Frequency and timing
- Roles and responsibilities
- How transparency and accountability will be enabled
- Approach to ensuring the plan can be adapted over time

2. Monitoring metrics

- Key performance indicators (quantitative or qualitative)

Consultation question:

Q. Do you have comments on how VicGrid should assess projects against the outcomes and expectations detailed in these draft guidelines?



Appendix A:

IAP2 Public participation spectrum

The International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2s) public participation spectrum positions community engagement approach along a spectrum from 'informing' through to through to 'empowering' as described in Table I.

The Victorian Government expects that project developers will view the 'involve' level as the minimum for eligibility, and developers are strongly encouraged to move beyond this and demonstrate community 'collaboration' and 'empowerment.'

Table I: Approaches for community engagement

Increasing impact on the decision 					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Promise to the public	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Public participation goal	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate our advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Minimum requirement

Note: Stronger levels of engagement are encouraged and will be assessed favourably.

Contact us



Phone: 1800 418 341

Email: vicgrid@deeca.vic.gov.au

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