**Regional Enterprise Plan
MIDLANDS**

MidlandsIreland.ie
gateway to enterprise

**Platform for Coal
Regions in Transition**

Midlands Engagement Process – Frequently Asked Questions

Please find below responses to queries that were raised about the Midlands Engagement Process by parties interested in registering a project or programme proposal(s). In order to contextualise the queries raised, it is useful to make some general points about the Midlands Engagement Process.

The Engagement Process welcomes the registration of projects to benefit the communities impacted by the cessation of peat harvesting across the wider Midlands, comprising Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon, East Galway, North Tipperary and Kildare.

The Engagement Process is being led by the Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) and is supported by EU START technical assistance. It aims to develop a project and programme inventory to identify initiatives that can assist communities, groups (unemployed, young people etc.) that are directly affected by the phase-out of peat and related peat power generation. This process will allow the MRTT, supported by the EU START team, to identify projects and programmes that will form an inventory of projects to best assist the transition process and identify where proposals can be grouped to promote synergies and economies of scale. It will also allow insight on which projects and programmes are "ready to go" against those which a have a longer lead-in / development time, thereby creating a list of potential projects that can be delivered over time across affected communities and groups.

Registered projects may be funded from a range of sources, including the Just Transition Fund announced in Budget 2020, Project Ireland 2040 funds and the EC's Just Transition Fund (available in 2021). It is hoped that these funds can be utilised to progress and implement projects, as their respective criteria, application processes and timelines are finalised. The national Just Transition Fund criteria will issue week commencing 15 June by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. **To apply for Just Transition Funding, one must first register their project(s) through the Engagement Process.** As ever, given that funding is finite and competitive, it is anticipated that not all projects included in the inventory will receive funding.

As this is the first phase of collating and assessing projects, the MRTT is not seeking large amounts of supporting detail or documentation at this stage. Subsequent detail and documentation will be determined by the application process for individual funds. The MRTT also recognises that some proposals are likely to be at an early stage and will require further development and elaboration including necessary approvals as required.

In the shorter term, the **Engagement Process is also being used as Stage 1 in identifying potential projects to be supported by the Irish Government's Just Transition Fund; representing €11 million in 2020.** There is a desire to distribute this national funding as

quickly and effectively as possible and the criteria and application process (Stage 2) will be published in the week of 15 June. Full details will be published on the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment website at this time. **However, to be considered for this national funding, potential applicants must have submitted a project or programme proposal via this current Engagement Process which closes on the 12th June.** Arising from this process it is hoped to develop a comprehensive overview of potential projects and programmes across the wider Midlands Region. Projects which are at an advanced stage of development and have notable impacts and benefits will be best placed to access earlier funding.

FAQ:

In cases where specific project elements were detailed as part of the query process, these have been removed in the interest of fairness and acknowledgment of the competitive nature of funding streams.

Where queries raised are of a similar nature, these are grouped and response provided in the following categories:

- The Engagement Process
- Project Registration Forms
- Project Scope
- Funding Programmes

The Engagement Process

> **It appears from the documentation issued that the purpose of this exercise is to create a list of projects and then to co-ordinate the various funding programmes which are available, identify which projects would be most appropriate for which funding programme and then, possibly, use specific funding from the Just Transition Fund for projects which would not otherwise be funded. Is that a proper understanding of what is intended?**

This is a correct interpretation of the proposed approach.

Registration of projects through the Midlands Engagement Process is a pre-requisite for applying for funding from the national Just Transition Fund (JTF).

The Midlands Engagement Process is intended to develop an inventory of projects to assist communities affected by the ending of peat production and power generation and the move to a low carbon society. Eventual funding for projects in the inventory may be sought from various national and EU funding mechanisms (e.g. Just Transition Fund, Project Ireland 2040 funds, the EU Just Transition Fund and other EU programmes).

It should be noted that several funding mechanisms are still in development and, consequently, details of their eligibility criteria and funding requirements are not yet known. Moreover, given that funding is finite, it is anticipated that not all projects included in the inventory will receive funding.

> **What is meant by the term wider Midlands?**

The 'target group' for the Midlands Engagement Process covers persons and communities affected by the ending of peat production and power generation. It includes, therefore, 'bog communities' affected by the closing down of peat harvesting activities in Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon, East Galway, North Tipperary and Kildare.

Project Registration Forms

Who can register a project?
Which application form should be used?

A project may be proposed by a community or be community sponsored (i.e. by a constituted community-based group), or a public, private or third sector body using the appropriate form available on www.midlandsireland.ie.

It is for the project submitter to decide if the project is registered as a community or a public, private or third sector project. If a project is community sponsored (i.e. by a constituted community-based group) then it may be submitted as a community project, otherwise it should be submitted as a public, private or third sector project.

It is not the intention to discriminate between community-sponsored and other projects. However, it may be that funding criteria and procedures may differ depending on the categorisation of the project.

Can a project be registered by an organisation which does not yet own or have control of the property where the project is envisaged?

A project can by registered even if the applicant does not yet own or have control of the property where the project is envisaged. This will serve as registration with MRTT (Phase 1) and enable inclusion within the inventory of project proposals. However, it should be recognised that any eventual funding support may be conditional on resolving any issue of property ownership or control.

Must a project have applied for and received planning permission prior to submission of funding?

It is not necessary to have already received planning permission to register a project. The project registration form serves as registration with the MRTT and enables its inclusion within the inventory of project proposals. However, eventual funding for a project may be conditional on receipt of planning permission.

Is any supporting documentation permitted with the initial proposal?

Supporting documentation will be required at a later stage.

Should project promoters concern themselves at this stage on trying to procure service etc.?

The Engagement Process is for registration of projects.

What is meant by 'target group of the project or programme'?

The term 'target group' refers primarily to the persons and communities affected by the ending of peat production and power generation and may, more broadly, concern those affected by the move to a low carbon society.

There is a limited space to state the aims – Are short answers expected for this section, or should more information be provided with a proposal?

As this is the first stage, short and precise answers are requested. This information is intended to contextualise the proposed project and illustrate how it aligns with relevant strategy/policy areas*.*

Under Project Detail, where requested to explain how the project or programme helps to meet the aims of existing strategies at an EU, national, regional & local levels. How much explanation is required?

The aim of this question is to contextualise the proposed project within local, regional, national and EU development policies. This may be answered with reference, for example, to local, regional, or national economic development plans, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, Regional Enterprise Plans, County Development Plans, Local Economic & Community Plans, or wider sustainable development strategy frameworks (e.g. Ireland 2040, EU Green Deal). It is sufficient to illustrate how the proposed project aligns with one or more relevant strategy/policy areas.

Can provisional costings be used at this stage to indicate the scale of what is envisaged rather than its precise cost?
Do we have to define the total cost of the programme?
How accurate do the costs need to be?

A project may be submitted with indicative cost estimates. However, it should be recognised that any eventual application for funding support will require supporting information to substantiate costing details.

Costs and Funding: are there guidelines for the split/ratio between capital expenditure and revenue costs?

There are no guidelines and no criteria concerning the ratio between capital and revenue costs. This information is requested to better understand the balance between fixed investment and other costs. It is also relevant for the purposes of assessing potential eligibility of projects under different financing mechanisms.

Costs & Funding: under 'Source', 'Amount', & 'Status', are you looking for other sources of funding sought or is this related to previous applications for funding

This section should be completed in relation to the preceding question ("If YES: What is funding source(s) to which the application has been made? What is the status of the funding application? (APPROVED / PENDING / REJECTED).") If an application – or applications – for funding of the project has already been made elsewhere, please specify:

- The source(s) to which funding has been applied for
- The amount of funding requested
- The status of the application (i.e. APPROVED / PENDING / REJECTED)

Impact: is it possible to provide examples of what you are looking for here?

The aim of this question is to identify the type and scale of impacts/benefits – whether economic, social, environmental etc. – that the proposed project is expected to have, primarily in relation to the 'target group' but also more widely.

The expected impacts/benefits will depend on the type and scope of project. If possible, it is preferable to provide quantitative indicators, but this is clearly not possible for all impacts. Where it is not possible, please provide a qualitative description.

Project Scope

Is there a preference for regional projects or county projects – or both?
Is there any mechanism in place to help coordinate funding applications and avoid duplicated effort?

Projects are welcomed across different geographic levels, from community, local, county to regional level. They should demonstrate that they will assist those persons and communities affected by the ending of peat production and power generation and the move to a low carbon society.

The possibility to group proposed projects is envisaged, especially where, this can create synergies, economies of scale, facilitate coordination and avoid duplication of effort. Further, it is possible that some redefinition of projects may be appropriate when the criteria for funding under the Just Transition Fund and other potential funding mechanisms become available. Where such adjustments are appropriate, they will be undertaken in consultation and with the approval of project applicants.

Where a community has developed an integrated development plan for its area, should that plan be submitted as a single project with multiple sub-projects or should each element of the plan be submitted as a separate project?
Is it better to apply for a programme that identifies individual projects or apply for a programme and the individual projects separately?

In general, where an integrated development plan exists, submission of a single integrated project is favoured over submission of multiple sub-projects. Subsequently, components/sub-projects within the registered integrated project can be refined to align them with appropriate available funding mechanisms. Noting that eligibility criteria and funding procedures for several potential funding mechanisms are not yet known.

Can a private company apply for a grant to carry out a feasibility study?

A project may be registered involving support to conduct a feasibility study. This will serve as registration with MRTT and enable inclusion within the inventory of project. However, eventual funding for a feasibility study will be dependent on the possibility to fulfil eligibility criteria under an appropriate national or EU funding programme. It should be noted that several funding programmes are still in development and, consequently, details of their eligibility criteria and funding procedures are not yet known.

Funding Programmes
- **Is there any indication of the size or value of projects that will be considered?**
- **Is there any guidance on eligible expenditure, max grant %, or overall limit?**
- **Is there any information on the % support e.g. 50% funding, 80% funding, 100% etc.**
- **What level of grant aid is envisaged?**
- **Will seed capital be considered within funding applications?**
- **Is there any guidance on the levels of funding that is available from the Just Transition Fund (e.g. is there a % of the overall project funded up to a maximum amount)?**
- **Is the fund considered to be a private fund, enabling a grant to be used as support funding for public competitive Funds such as EI REDF, URDF etc.**
- **Can the Just Transition Fund be used as balancing funding for a Fáilte Ireland "Platforms for Growth" funded project?**
- **Is the Just Transition Fund treated as Public funding?**
- **What would you envisage as likely minimum and maximum funding under the Just Transition Fund?**
- **What is likely timescale of the call for applications and funding after the current submission / expression of interest process**

Guidance on eligibility criteria and funding procedures are dependent on the funding body, e.g. in the case of the Just Transition Fund (JTF) DCCAE will issue detailed programme criteria and timelines the week commencing June 15 2020.

What level of accompanying documentation (e.g. drawings, planning permission, evidence of matching finance, detailed financial forecasts) will be expected to evaluate projects later, as project applicants will have to work on this in the meantime?

Several funding mechanisms are still in development and, consequently, details of their eligibility criteria and funding procedures are not yet known

Does a project idea have to be registered under the Midlands Engagement Process before making an application to the Just Transition Fund?
How can a project progress to Stage 2 of the Just Transition Fund (JTF)
Guidance on the timeline for the Just Transition Fund process and project delivery
What timeframe is it envisaged for completion of a project to be eligible to drawdown the proposed grant aid?
Are there timelines for project delivery?

- Registration of projects through the Midlands Engagement Process (Phase 1) on the appropriate application form available on www.midlandsireland.ie and submission to **JustTransition@mrtt.ie** is a pre- requisite to applying for funding from the Just Transition Fund.
- Detailed criteria for the Just Transition Fund will be provided by DCCAE week commencing June 15th.

Timelines for project delivery will depend on the nature of the project and eventual funding programme.

Just Transition Fund – Eligible activities

- **Can the fund be used to purchase land to develop an Enterprise Centre/Business Units?**
- **Can the fund be used to purchase a building to develop an e-Working Facility/Enterprise Units?**
- **Can the Just Transition Fund be used to fund a Programme Manager / Project Manager for an Integrated Project / Enterprise Centre / Co-working facility for a period of 5+ years?**
- **Can a Local Authority be grant aided or does an application have to be submitted by a separate company?**
- **Can the Just Transition Fund be used by community organisations?**
- **Can the Just Transition Fund be used to upgrade paths and walking and cycling routes?**

The criteria and application process for the Just Transition Fund (Stage 2) will published week commencing 15 June on the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment website.