



Environment Protection Authority

Circular Solar Phase 2 Grants Program

Application guidelines



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Published by:

NSW Environment Protection Authority

4 Parramatta Square

12 Darcy Street, Parramatta NSW 2150

Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124

Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)

Phone: 131 555 (NSW only – environment information and publications requests)

Fax: +61 2 9995 5999

TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 131 555

Speak and listen users:

phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 131 555

Email: info@epa.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au

Report pollution and environmental incidents

Environment Line: 131 555 (NSW only) or info@epa.nsw.gov.au

See also www.epa.nsw.gov.au

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Contents

Introduction	1
Background	1
Circular Solar grants program priorities	1
Aims	1
Expressions of interest	2
Indicative timeline	3
Organisations eligible for funding	3
Partnership projects	4
Conditions of eligibility	4
Funding	5
Applicant co-contribution	5
Applicant in-kind contribution	5
Funding from multiple sources	5
Projects and items that will be grant funded	6
Projects and items that will not be grant funded	6
Funding allocation	7
Budget	7
Cost-benefit (economic) and financial analysis	7
Application advisory service	8
Grant conditions	9
Reporting	9
Project duration	10
Conflict of interest	10
Confidentiality	10
Misleading or false information	10
Notification of grant decisions	11
Application process	11
Assessment criteria	11

Introduction

The solar panel and battery-waste stream represents a considerable opportunity to recover valuable materials and create new markets. Investment is needed to help transition these products to operate within a circular economy and future-proof the management at end-of-life.

Background

The International Energy Agency has forecast that Australia will have one of the most significant accumulated solar panel waste streams in the world. Although current volumes are relatively low (less than 2,000 tonnes generated in NSW per year), this emerging waste stream is expected to rapidly increase as installed systems reach end of life. In NSW, it is forecast that this waste stream could generate 3,000–10,000 tonnes per year by 2025 and 34,000–63,000 tonnes per year by 2035. These figures are reported in the scoping study conducted by University of Technology Sydney Institute of Sustainable Futures.

NSW has a growing number of large-scale solar projects across the state. This positions NSW to take a proactive approach in addressing this emerging waste stream. More broadly, Australia is also a leading market worldwide for energy storage batteries. However, only 3–5% of all batteries (not including lead-acid batteries) in Australia are collected for recycling.

The first phase of the Circular Solar recycling fund program allocated over \$1 million towards trial projects that tested collection, reuse and recycling business models. These projects promoted circular economy activities and showed end-to-end solutions for managing solar panel and batteries at end of life. Information on NSW market readiness and future needs for solar panel and battery recovery has been incorporated into the development of this second phase of funding.

Circular Solar grants program priorities

- Reduce solar panel and associated battery waste entering landfill in NSW.
- Promote circular economy models for managing waste at end-of-life.
- Increase the capability and capacity of industry to recover and reprocess end-of-life solar panels and associated large energy storage system batteries.
- Improve the recyclability/reusability/refurbish potential by using high-value recovery and/or processing technologies.
- Develop secondary markets for resources recovered from solar panels and batteries.
- Update standards for reuse of solar panel and battery systems that are still functioning efficiently after being decommissioned.
- Grow cost-effective recovery logistic models.
- Partnerships that deliver end-to-end solutions across the whole supply chain.
- Create immediate and ongoing job creation and economic activity.

Aims

The NSW Government has committed \$10 million to support projects that will reduce landfilling of solar panels and their associated batteries. This investment is intended to future-proof the management of this growing waste stream and help NSW transition to renewable energy sources within a circular economy.

A total of \$7 million is available under this Circular Solar Phase 2 grants program for eligible projects. Funding will be available as a single stream to allow all project proposals to compete against each other for funding. Proposals can only be submitted under one of three categories with the funding request caps indicated in the table below.

Table 1 Funding caps

Funding category	Funding cap per project
1. New infrastructure and expansions	\$3.5 million
2. Research and development for reuse, second hand or refurbished items, and market development for recovered materials.	\$100,000–\$1 million
3. Collection and recovery logistics	\$500,000–\$1 million

Expression of Interest

The EPA is conducting the Circular Solar Phase 2 grants program in the following two stages:

- Stage 1: Expressions of Interest (EOI) and
- Stage 2: Final application

The aims of the EOI stage are to:

- a) receive an overview from proponents with their project proposal that clearly shows they have the capacity and capability to address the program priorities
- b) shortlist those organisations that have met the program priorities to participate in Stage 2.

The aims of the final application Stage 2 are to:

- a) receive a detailed final application from shortlisted organisations, including a detailed budget and cost-benefit and financial analysis, to identify the developed project proposals that deliver on the program priorities
- b) determine the projects to be funded under the Circular Solar grants program.

Expressions of interest

The Circular Solar Phase 2 grant program will be conducted in two stages.

Stage 1

The EOI stage is an opportunity to identify interest across the three funding categories: new infrastructure and expansions, research and development, collection and recovery logistics.

EOI responses must:

- specify which funding category their project proposal falls under
- give an overview of their project and activities
- identify project partners and their specific roles, information on end-markets for recovered materials
- provide information about how the project addresses the program priorities.

EOI responses must meet the eligibility criteria described in the *Conditions of eligibility* section below.

EOI responses will be assessed by an independent technical review committee (TRC) against the program assessment criteria (Page 11). The TRC will recommend projects to progress to Stage 2.

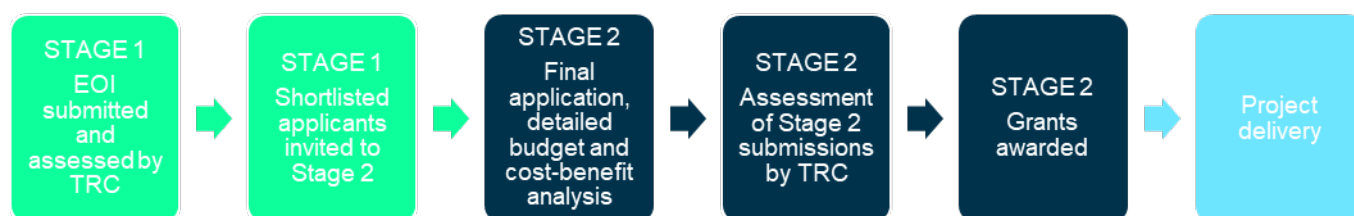
Stage 2

Responses shortlisted in Stage 1 will be eligible to participate in Stage 2. Proponents will receive an invitation from the EPA to submit a final detailed application. Stage 2 participants will have six weeks to:

- develop their final application
- formalise partnerships
- complete a detailed budget using the EPA template that will be provided
- conduct an economic analysis.

A free application advisory service (AAS), provided by an independent contractor, is available to all Stage 2 applicants by a separate support request application through the EPA.

Figure 1 Circular Solar Phase 2 grant program stages



Indicative timeline

Table 2 Indicative timeline

EOI application process	Date
EOI stage opens	23 September 2021
EOI stage closing date and time	COB 4 November 2021
Stage 1 applications assessed by TRC	Late November 2021
EOI applicants shortlisted to participate in Stage 2 notified	Early January 2022
Stage 2 closing date	Late February 2022
Stage 2 TRC assessment	Late March 2022
Announcement of successful projects	April 2022

Organisations eligible for funding

The applicant (lead organisation) must hold an Australian Business Number (ABN) and be either:

- an Australian entity or partnership incorporated under the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)
- a council (as defined in the NSW Local Government Act 1993), regional organisation of councils or another local government-controlled organisation
- a state government entity;
- an Australian research institution, which can be a tertiary education institution, a government agency established for the purpose of research, a cooperative research centre, an institute or

research facilities must provide evidence of accreditation (e.g. National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia, or similar)

- a non-government/not-for-profit organisation (must comply with the ATO's definition) with an established legal status, or those without a legal status that are able to have grant funds administered by another organisation with legal status.

Partnership projects

The EPA expects all project proposals to involve strong and collaborative partnerships. Applicants are encouraged to develop partnership projects with an emphasis on end-to-end supply chain collaboration. For example, entities currently generating solar panel and/or battery system waste may partner with those that collect, reprocess and/or reuse the material.

Partnership projects can improve the implementation and reach of projects. Proposals should aim to show enduring partnerships across the supply chain between business (such as manufacturers of batteries/solar panels, installers, recyclers/reuse facilities and end users), investors, industry, local government and potentially tertiary/research organisations.

Partnership agreements may be demonstrated through a letter of support from the partnership organisation specifying the nature of support and role in project. Project management roles, responsibilities, funding contributions (in-kind and cash) and reporting requirements must be clearly defined in the letter.

The lead applicant will be responsible for the performance of the partner organisations participating in the project.

Conditions of eligibility

These conditions will be considered by the TRC during the assessment of EOI responses. In responding to this EOI, applicants must:

- complete the EOI form
- show that the project is primarily focused on end-of-life solar panels and/or associated battery systems
- have your application signed and endorsed by a senior office bearer from the lead organisation. For groups of councils, evidence of support must be provided from the general managers of all participating councils, or their delegates
- ensure your application is received by the closing date and time. Late applications will not be accepted
- show that the time required for all necessary planning, regulatory or other approvals has been considered
- submit projects that will start by June 2022 and finish by 30 June 2024 — this includes submitting the final report
- show that the project is primarily focused on end-of-life solar panels and/or associated battery systems
- show you have the means or support to complete the project and related administrative work by the required date. This should include support from project partners
- show that you, your related entities and your project partners, have a satisfactory compliance history under NSW environment protection laws.

Funding

A total of \$7 million is available under the Circular Solar grants program. By submitting a response to this EOI, applicants acknowledge that the EPA does not guarantee either any funding or the amount of the funding requested. The EPA may, at its discretion, offer partial funding to projects.

Funding is provided at the absolute discretion of the EPA and the EPA's decisions regarding funding are final. Proposals must apply under one of the following categories below and their associated funding cap, covering up to 75% of the capital costs relating to the projects.

Table 3 Funding caps

Funding category	Funding cap per project
New infrastructure and expansions	\$3.5 million
Research and development for reuse, second hand or refurbished items, and market development for recovered materials.	\$100,000–\$1 million
Collection and recovery logistics	\$500,000–\$1 million

Applicant co-contribution

Applicants are required to provide a minimum cash co-contribution of 25% of eligible project costs which can be attributed to the payment of specific invoices and eligible budget items. The co-contribution should be itemised in the application budget. The more an applicant can show extra value in the project from their own contributions, the higher the project will rank under the 'value for money' assessment criterion.

Funding from other EPA grants or programs (such as Community Recycling Centres or other infrastructure grants) must not be included as the co-contribution.

Applicant in-kind contribution

Applicants should list any 'in-kind' contributions in their application budget. In-kind contributions do not form part of your cash co-contribution but will demonstrate additional commitment to the project.

In-kind activities include contributions to a project that are not financial. Examples include staff time to manage a project or volunteer labour, installation costs that use existing internal resources, use of equipment or machinery that is already owned and used at no cost.

Funding from multiple sources

Activities or equipment for which applicants have received funding or support from other funding sources (e.g. other grant programs) will not be funded. If you have or will apply for funding from multiple government sources, you must advise if you:

- have secured funding from another government agency for the same or related activities to those you are seeking funds for from the EPA
- have current applications lodged with other government agencies for the same project or project activities
- receive funding from other government agencies while your project is under way.

Projects and items that will be grant funded

Examples of items eligible for funding include, but are not limited to, the list below:

- New infrastructure builds or expansions to existing facilities accepting solar panels and associated batteries.
- High-value recovery processing technologies that can recover close to 90% or more of materials from solar panels.
- Equipment upgrades and modifications at an existing facility to process solar panels and/or associated batteries.
- Upscaling pilot technologies to expand into commercial scale services.
- Mobile processing plants with high recovery rates.
- Commercially sound projects that seek to maximise public benefits (e.g. diversion of waste from landfill and other environmental benefits, and creation of new jobs).
- Technologies to extend the life of serviceable panels/waste avoidance component.
- Collaboration with local councils to provide local options for end-of-life management.
- Research and development activities that will generate new knowledge and may lead to practical applications, new and improved materials, products, processes or services, such as
 - identifying the extent of early losses/decommissioning of panel systems across NSW
 - social perspectives and appetite for end-of-life management options
 - sample testing of installed rooftop system efficiency.
- Increasing end markets for recovered or repurposed solar panels and associated batteries or their components.
- Development of industry standards or specifications.
- Upscaling trial activities to establish a commercial scale recovery logistics model across NSW.
- System improvements that provide benefits to the quality and quantity of products collected.
- Collection infrastructure and equipment installed permanently or semi-permanently at public locations.

If your proposal focus is not included on the list, please contact the EPA to discuss your project and eligible items for funding.

Projects and items that will not be grant funded

The below list of items will **not** be funded under the Circular Solar grants program. The EPA may, at its absolute discretion, update or add to the items and projects that will not be funded at any time.

- Projects not located in NSW.
- projects and budget items that do not align with the objectives of the grant program.
- Transporting components offshore for processing. All project activities must be based in NSW.
- Landfilling more than 20% of residuals from recovered resources.
- Projects that address household batteries and not large energy storage system batteries associated with solar panels.
- Construction or modification of
 - facilities that produce fuels from waste inputs
 - pyrolysis facilities
 - facilities that use waste material as an energy source.
- Projects that would proceed without grant funding, and requests for retrospective funding.

- Costs associated with disposal of solar panels or associated battery systems to landfill.
- Costs of obtaining planning approval or environment protection licences.
- Purchase of plant or equipment that has been previously owned by any associated entity.
- Land acquisition and venture capital.
- Project proposals submitted by applicants who are unable to show the financial capability to complete the project.
- Installation activities completed by internal staff resources (considered in-kind contribution)
- Ongoing operational costs such as, but not limited to, rent, insurance, salaries, electricity, water and other utilities.
- Project activities or equipment that applicants have received via funding or support from other funding sources (e.g. other grant programs).
- Costs associated with the application or gaining of funding.
- Costs associated with internal administration, travel, office support and communications (considered in-kind contribution).
- Process or logistic vehicles, e.g. fork-lifts, prime movers, front-end loaders.
- Project contingency funds.
- Freight and shipping fees including customs and/or duties, e.g. for new equipment.
- Costs relating to site preparations and clean-up, e.g. fencing, painting of facilities, signage, WHS activities, training and skip bins.

Funding allocation

It is proposed that funding allocation for successful projects awarded grants after Stage 2 will be as follows:

- 10% of approved funding on signing the grant agreement.
- 40% of approved funding on submission and approval of the end of year 1 report.
- 30% of approved funding on achievement of key milestones (to be defined in the funding agreement).
- 20% of approved funding at the close of the project.

Budget

Applicants shortlisted to participate in Stage 2 must provide a detailed budget using the template to be provided by the EPA.

Goods and services tax (GST) should **not** be included in the application budget.

Cost-benefit (economic) and financial analysis

Applicants who are shortlisted to participate in Stage 2 must undertake a cost-benefit and financial analysis. This analysis ensures that approved projects:

- will provide value for money
- are financially viable
- will deliver a net public benefit
- help to develop the domestic recycling industry.

For further guidance on completing a cost-benefit analysis, applicants should refer to [NSW Treasury's NSW Government Guide to Cost-benefit Analysis](#) and consider applying to the EPA Application Advisory Service (AAS). See details on how to apply below.

Stage 2 applicants will be provided with the cost-benefit and financial analysis template. Other formats will not be accepted.

Stage 2 applicants should provide a detailed analysis of the following criteria to support their final application:

- All costs are identified (e.g. capital, operating, maintenance and provision for contingencies).
- All benefits are identified (e.g. avoided costs, savings and revenue from sale of recovered materials).
- All non-market values are identified and quantified.
- Net benefits are assessed (using the discounted stream of costs and benefits based on NSW Treasury's Guide to Cost-benefit Analysis) and include data on
 - net present value with and without grant funding
 - cost-benefit ratio
 - internal rate of return (percentage)
 - dollars of grant funding per tonne of additional material recycled
 - sensitivity testing (analyse options under different scenarios and discount rates).
- All references, including the data sources and assumptions, are documented.

The EPA will engage an independent financial services consultant to undertake the assessment of the cost benefit and financial analyses.

Application advisory service

The EPA provides a free application advisory service (AAS) to support eligible applicants to prepare their grant applications. This service is provided by an independent contractor. Only applicants who are shortlisted to participate in Stage 2 are eligible for AAS support.

Under the AAS the EPA provides up to 10 hours of support to eligible Stage 2 applicants. Additional hours may be available to applicants that are regionally located or demonstrate hardship; for example, councils in rural and regional areas, and not-for-profit organisations.

The role of the application advisors will be to:

- provide specialist advice to the applicant as it prepares its grant application
- advise on appropriate analysis, content and presentation of information
- provide comment and critical feedback on the quality of the business case presented.

The application advisors may cover the following areas of planning and analysis:

- Market analysis, including demand for product.
- Technical analysis, including selection, integration and optimisation of plant and equipment.
- Cost-benefit and financial analysis support.
- Planning and licensing analysis.
- Project planning to detail steps involved in commissioning and ongoing operation of the infrastructure.

EPA funded application advisors will not:

- gather background information, although they can advise on where to access the necessary information (it is expected that the applicant will have already developed or have this ready)
- prepare a complete business case on behalf of the applicant
- prepare a complete grant application on behalf of the applicant.

The support is at the discretion of the EPA and not all applicants will necessarily receive support. A decision by the EPA not to provide application support does not imply that the project is ineligible for funding. Conversely receiving AAS assistance does not guarantee application success.

If successful in applying for support, the EPA program manager will contact applicants to arrange a meeting time with the advisor. Advisors are contracted by the EPA and are bound to keep information provided by applicants confidential.

Applicants shortlisted to Stage 2 will be provided information on how to apply to the application advisory service.

Grant conditions

EOI applicants shortlisted to participate in Stage 2 must submit the following to the EPA before continuing with the Stage 2 process:

- A signed letter of agreement (in a form provided by the EPA) to progress with the Stage 2 final grant application. This letter will outline the conditions of Stage 2 for completing the application form, detailed budget template and cost-benefit and financial analysis template.
- If applicable, the application form requesting to receive AAS support.

Applicants who progress through Stage 2 and are awarded project funding will be required to:

- sign the grant agreement. Grantees have up to 30 days from the date of formal notification of the offer of funding to do this. If the agreement is not signed within the specified period, the offer of funding may lapse
- confirm a final schedule of payment and reporting dates for all project activities
- provide milestone and final reports in accordance with the reporting requirements outlined in the funding agreement, including an independently certified final statement of expenditure
- provide all related invoice and receipts to the EPA for grant expenditure
- provide a tax invoice to the EPA for each grant instalment
- hold appropriate insurance and public liability coverage
- regularly engage (i.e. at least every quarter by phone) with the EPA's Waste and Recycling Infrastructure Unit
- acknowledge the Circular Solar grant program and the support of the EPA on all publications, externally distributed reports, websites and publicity materials including resources, kit items, brochures, signage, advertising and invitations relating to the project, in accordance with the grant agreement
- invite a NSW Government representative to any launch or public event associated with this funding
- use and comply with EPA or NSW Government branding requirements
- comply with any other conditions that may be outlined in the Stage 2 suite of documents
- hold grant funds in a separate, interest-bearing account until expended. Grantees may apply to the EPA to spend interest accrued on eligible project costs that will enhance the outcomes of the project.

Reporting

Project proposals must include a robust process for monitoring, evaluating and reporting about the success or failure of the project, including gathering supporting evidence. This includes the assessment of any future activities enabled by the funded project.

Projects that receive funding will be required to provide progress reports at each milestone, including details on all the activities completed, outcomes and next steps. Grant projects are also

required to provide an evaluation report at project completion, including the development of a project case study.

Project duration

There is limited capacity to carry over unspent program funds to future financial years. Consequently, projects must be completed by 30 June 2024.

For projects that are not completed by 30 June 2024, a formal variation must be submitted to the EPA justifying why the grant should not be terminated. Requests for variations to projects must be submitted in writing to the EPA as soon as possible. Extensions of time will only be approved under exceptional circumstances. Approval of variation requests is at the discretion of the EPA.

Successful applicants will be required to demonstrate commencement within one month of signing the grant agreement, which includes obtaining all approvals, advertising tenders or commencement of works. If a project is not commenced within this period and without justification and EPA approval the grant may be revoked.

Final payments will not be made until project acquittal requirements have been completed.

Conflict of interest

Applicants are required to declare any real, potential or perceived conflict of interest that they may be aware of in relation to being awarded a grant, particularly where:

- the project that you are proposing will be undertaken on private land and that land is owned by a member or members (or relatives) of the organisation applying for a grant
- members, or relatives of members, of the organisation applying for a grant are being paid as project managers (or similar) with EPA funds
- members, or relatives of members, of the organisation applying for a grant are being paid as contractors with EPA funds
- works carried out by the project could create current or future financial or other benefit for members of the organisation applying for the grant, or their relatives
- third parties used to assist in the preparation of the grant application will potentially be engaged to carry out work on the project.

Such circumstances do not exclude the project from being funded, however, they must be acknowledged as a potential conflict of interest. The TRC will assess each situation on its merits.

Confidentiality

The EPA will use the information you supply to assess your project for funding. The EPA may share this information with other EPA agencies. Information on funded projects may be used for promotional purposes. Information that you provide to us may be shared with other NSW Government and Australian Government agencies and consultants on a confidential basis to better understand the status of the relevant waste markets or infrastructure.

Otherwise, subject to legal requirements of disclosure, we will treat your application confidentially. We will endeavour to treat sensitive personal and confidential information that you provide to us confidentially. If you require strict commercial confidentiality, you should request this in your application. However, all documents held by the EPA are subject to the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*.

Misleading or false information

Applications that include misleading or false information will not be considered for funding. If the EPA is made aware of any issues relating to misleading or false information after a grant has been

awarded, it can withdraw funding from the grantee. Any EPA funds spent on the project may be required to be repaid.

Notification of grant decisions

The Minister for Energy and Environment may publicly announce the successful applications. Applicants will also be notified in writing. Applicants must not promote their participation in the Circular Solar grants program, or their funding if any is ultimately awarded, until the project has been formally announced.

Application process

How to apply

Use [SmartyGrants](#) to apply.

Assessment and notification

After the closing date, the EPA will check whether your application is eligible and complete. The EPA establishes an independent TRC for each grant program. The TRC is made up of people with knowledge and experience relevant to the grant program. TRC members agree to undertake their duties within the principles of ethical conduct, integrity, objectivity and independence.

They are also required to keep all matters concerning applications confidential and to declare any potential conflict of interest. Please note, the TRC membership is confidential to avoid opportunity for influence. The TRC will assess the merit of your application against the criteria outlined in these guidelines.

This will be done for all EOI and Stage 2 applications. You must refer to the assessment criteria when responding to the application questions to make sure you are explaining how your proposed project aligns to these priorities. The application form is designed to help you provide the type of information the TRC needs to assess whether project meets the assessment criteria.

The assessment process is overseen by an independent probity auditor. The Stage 2 assessment will also include advice from the independent financial services consultant's review of projects cost-benefit and financial analyses. The TRC will make recommendations to the EPA who will ultimately approve the funding.

Successful applicants may not receive the full amount requested and may be subject to special, as well as general, conditions of funding. Decisions by the EPA are final. There is no appeal process.

Assessment criteria

Criterion 1. The project will improve circularity of end-of-life solar panel and associated batteries in NSW by addressing critical gaps and barriers in the processing or use of materials. 20%

- The project shows clear understanding of end-of-life solar panel and/or batteries and circular economy principles, including in different sectors.
- Supply and demand of the project materials and products are well understood; logistics have been considered; and activation of end-markets is achieved or aimed for.
- The project has innovative features and benefits that may result in improved or new products, services, process, technologies or markets.
- The project will lead to increased resource recovery rates and/or efficiencies compared to current market practice.

- Shows capacity and capability to address gaps in NSW circular economy infrastructure .

Criterion 2. The lead organisation and project partners have shown an ability to deliver the project to a high standard. 25%

- Evidence of partnerships or potential partnerships, leading to better resource recovery outcomes in NSW .
- identification of uncertainty, risks and barriers and proposed mitigation strategies.
- Research and development activities include a robust process for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the success or failure of the project, including supporting evidence and the assessment of any future activities enabled by the funded project.
- Appropriate evaluation metrics and robust data collection.
- The application shows sound project planning and methodology, including start date in June 2022.

Criterion 3. The project proposes suitable suppliers, partnerships, technologies, use and re-supply of products and materials including end-markets. 25%

- Evidence of whole-of-supply chain solutions, including suppliers of materials.
- Clear reduction and/or potential to reduce solar panel and battery waste entering landfill.
- Proposed activities show safe collection/handling and compliance with environmental laws.
- The technology and processes used are suitable to maintain highest value of the collected products and materials (e.g. activities that sit higher on the EPA waste hierarchy and/or achieves 80% or more material recovery).
- Facilities are suitable for the proposed location, considering other existing and planned infrastructure servicing the region.
- Show access to offtake markets, including ability to meet appropriate specifications and quality standards for products.

Criterion 4. The project has potential to become business as usual for the participating organisations. 20%

- A credible business case with clear potential to deliver commercially viable outcomes to manage solar panel and battery products in NSW.
- The project shows feasibility and market readiness.
- Research and development will inform a commercially viable outcome to manage solar panel and battery products in NSW.
- The project shows it will seek to overcome the cost barriers associated with solar panel and/or battery system collection/recovery.
- Pricing and service offering are viable and credible.

Criterion 5. The project provides economic, environmental and social benefits for the community of NSW, including job creation and economic value. 10%

- Potential to leave a lasting impact.
- Shows value for money.
- Social benefits, including job creation in NSW and how the project addresses regional and remote waste challenges.
- Alignment with relevant sustainability policies and strategies, including the National Waste Policy Action Plan, NSW Circular Economy Policy Statement and NSW Net Zero Plan.