

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	November 2021
Project contact name:	Jill Walker
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Total cost (£k)	*detailed separately
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	*detailed separately

1. Problem(s)

This should outline the problem(s) which is/are being addressed by the VCMA Project

Although NGN is in constant communication with customers via a range of different channels, we know some of our audience remain hard to reach, in particular those customers living in vulnerable situations. This proportion of our customer base includes the young, older people, those with health conditions, those on low incomes and non-English speaking communities. In addition, it is a challenge for those living in rural isolation to have access to many services, including access to the internet and other essential services. NGN knows that more can be done to help these customers better access our services and to maximise engagement with key safety-critical messages.

1.1 The solution

NGN has previously commissioned and carried out research with a range of vulnerable customer audiences. This includes those on low incomes, older people, and those with long-term health conditions, which may make it more difficult to access support and services. The challenge now is to translate that customer intelligence and understanding, into an effective communications and Public Relations (PR) plan, delivered by an expert external agency, to better engage hard to reach groups. Harvey & Hugo, an integrated communications agency specialising in PR and strategic campaigns, will be appointed to deliver this campaign and address this challenge. Harvey & Hugo have experience of working on campaigns to reach hard to reach groups including Darlington Building Society, Darlington Cares, Wag & Company and Speakeasy and have worked with local authorities, Age UK, the NHS, community groups and local businesses to reach these audiences. Harvey & Hugo are a local supplier, based in the region that we serve, which provides added value as they have experience of working in our target geographical areas.

2. Scope and Objectives

The scope and objectives of the VCMA Project should be clearly defined including the benefits which would directly impact customers on the participating GDNs' network(s), and where the benefits of the VCMA Projects lie.

2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:

- To increase CO Awareness and engagement (measured through reach) targeted at hotspot areas of low awareness and engagement as analysed by customer research
- Significantly increase PSR registrations and PSR awareness, targeted at hotspot areas of low awareness and engagement as analysed by NGN customer research, measured by number of sign-ups via NGN platforms.
- To increase awareness of the 0800 National Gas Emergency number across the network
- To increase engagement with traditionally hard to reach individuals and communities within the NGN region and identify the best methods of reaching these groups (measured by reach, click-throughs, completions, engagements, views, likes, shares)

2.2 Scope

- An overarching communications strategy for a dynamic and integrated PR campaign, supported by daughter strategies for smaller elements of the campaign as and when required
- Draft versions of PR materials for the NGN Communications Team to sign off
- Social media content planned ahead, which can be incorporated into the wider NGN weekly social media plan
- Regular monthly evaluation report of activity including media relations, social media work, events and any stakeholder engagement
- Summaries of outputs and outcomes produced at the request by the NGN Communications Team, as and when required
- End-of-campaign evaluation report, drawing together all activities, outputs, outcomes and key achievements

3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA

This should include an explanation of why the VCMA Project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria. This is a requirement

This project qualifies under the criteria for VCMA funding, as it will drive engagement and awareness of key safety-critical messages around Carbon Monoxide, the National Gas Emergency number and the PSR, targeting traditionally hard to reach sectors of the NGN customer audience.

There will be no collaboration from other GDN's nor other funded sources.

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- The project aligns with NGN's Vulnerability Strategy as the approach adopted within this project, focuses on communicating clearly and consistently and understanding customer needs, in particular, those living in vulnerable situations
- The campaign has the potential to reach customers who live with one or more of the following vulnerabilities, i.e., financial hardship, physical and mental disabilities, rural isolation, and temporary vulnerabilities. These are all themes under the NGN Vulnerability Strategy.
- Has defined outcomes as required (see outcomes section)
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms
- NGN have calculated that this project will have a positive SROI

4. Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

This should provide information of the customer engagement that has taken place in the development of VCMA Projects where appropriate. If there is no evidence of stakeholder engagement or customer support, this should justify why it was not appropriate to engage with stakeholders and customers.

Within the Northern Gas Networks region, we serve 2.7 million gas-using households. The socio-economic characteristics of our region mean that we operate in many communities that are amongst the most economically deprived in the whole country. This has been a key factor in prioritising engagement with vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups of customers, telling them about our services, about what we do and how we could improve.

Each year, we undertake analysis of all the insight we've heard in the previous year to prioritise those issues our stakeholders most want to engage on. Over the past 12-18 months, we've done this in a number of ways.

4.1 Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) Workshops 2020 – 2021

Asking our stakeholders what's important – using our wide range of engagement mechanisms from strategic workshops to customer perceptions, we asked stakeholders to prioritise what is most important to them (including digital engagement in light of CV-19). During 2020-2021 we held multiple workshops with our stakeholders, on the subject of customers in vulnerable situations.

During our August 2020 CV-19 specific workshop, our stakeholders identified that there was an increased risk of CO poisoning due to the impact of the pandemic. Many people have been furloughed, are on lower incomes and suffered redundancy, which have created significant financial challenges. As a consequence, maintaining and repairing/replacing appliances is not a priority for these groups, therefore significantly increasing the risk of CO poisoning. Stakeholders said there needs to be more focus on CO awareness, so customers understand the risks posed by not having appliances repaired or serviced. For those customers living in poor housing stock and potentially living in fuel poverty, there is likely to be a significant gap in their knowledge around CO.

In January 2021, we held a specific fuel poverty workshop. During this workshop our stakeholders said it would be good for NGN to use partners to promote the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES). They also said that fuel, food and general poverty are all linked and that we need more streamlined ways of working together, using partners to help raise awareness of different funding and support available, including the benefits of the PSR. This project fully aligns with the feedback received at that workshop as it will be promoting the PSR and CO awareness.

In our wider stakeholder engagement programme, we have also heard very strongly, how safety is at the forefront of stakeholders' minds. Stakeholders see a strong correlation between safety and our social obligations and have told us that it is essential that we continue to raise awareness of carbon monoxide, because doing so saves lives.

4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support our customers in vulnerable situations. Checking we've got it right – using a range of engagement mechanisms to assess and challenge our response to stakeholder feedback, ensuring we are responding in the right way. This has offered us robust challenges into how we deal with customers in vulnerable situations which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

4.3 CO and PSR research and Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT)

Social indicator mapping was undertaken previously in 2019. Further research around Carbon Monoxide (CO) and Priority Services Register (PSR) were undertaken in January 2021. This was shared as part of our stakeholder engagement. A new VMT has been demonstrated to stakeholders to highlight any vulnerability gaps we have on our network. The system allows you to add multiple factors of vulnerability together to create a heat map for where factors combine to create areas of highest need. All data can be mixed and matched to answer complicated questions, e.g. see where there are a high number of people living in fuel poverty, as well as CO hotspots. The tool has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues.

CV-19 research commissioned by NGN in June 2020, highlighted wider conclusions around the pandemic below. This provides further evidence to support this project.

- The most severely impacted include those with multiple risk factors and vulnerabilities
- Those with severe health risks who were shielding faced multiple difficulties
- Different vulnerability factors tend to be concentrated in the same local areas
- Covid-19 impacts extend beyond vulnerable people to the organisations who support them
- Potential responses to Covid-19 impacts on vulnerable groups are wide ranging and likely to involve operational practices, communication to customers, action on fuel poverty, and help for vulnerable customers and the groups who support them.

NGN commissioned research around CO and PSR in January 2021. Some, if not all of the actions from that research will be addressed by supporting this project which will:

- Increase awareness of the dangers of CO
- Increase understanding of what CO is
- Encourage people to get a CO alarm
- Encourage people to test their alarms regularly (ie. once a month)
- Increase awareness of the PSR – over half of respondents were not aware of the PSR
- Increase the number of sign-ups to the PSR

At an overall level, respondents understanding of what carbon monoxide is saw the majority (36%) state that it can kill you or is a silent killer and an additional 7% described symptoms such as dangerous to lungs and breathing issues. 22% stated that it's a gas which is invisible, colourless, odourless and not detectable and 21% stated it's a gas which is dangerous, deadly, poisonous and toxic. 8% referred to the gas coming from faulty fuel equipment.

Only 23% of respondents recalled specific Carbon Monoxide campaigns while 63% did not.

57% of respondents had no understanding of the Priority Services Register. While 10% identified it as a service for vulnerable, elderly, those with kids or on low incomes. 15% of respondents were on the Priority Services Register. 39% of the respondents heard about it from their energy provider and 71% said there was nothing stopping them if they were eligible or recommending to others.

To promote awareness of the Priority Services Register, 40% said to advertise or that it should be communicated followed by 18% saying it should be on TV, and 14% with leaflets or flyers. Respondents believe the information should be promoted on social media, in supermarkets and in doctors surgeries. The preferred method of interaction was advertising with 46% followed by email with 29% and letter with 21%.

This project therefore aligns with the need to promote CO awareness and the PSR as customers have expressed that this information should be promoted via social media and other channels.

4.4 Vulnerability Strategy AAA Framework

Within our vulnerability strategy we have developed, with the help of our stakeholders, the 'AAA' framework. This helps us support our customers in vulnerable situations. Awareness, Accessibility and Action. By adapting this principles-based approach into our AAA framework, we will ensure that all customers are treated fairly and consistently. All themes of NGN's Vulnerability Strategy will be addressed through the campaign.

5. Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

Details of the VCMA Project outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these, interim milestones and how the Funding Licensee will evaluate whether the project has been successful. Each action should have a proportion of the funding allocated.

5.1 Outcomes

- Number of vulnerable customers we aim to reach in the first year: Through social media and media coverage.
 - Reach prediction: 500,000
- Increase the number of registrations to the PSR a result of increased awareness
- Percentage increase in understanding of CO pre and post activity measured by CO awareness survey

We will measure the:

1. Number of people that the campaign has reached with messages about carbon monoxide
2. Number of people that the campaign has reached with messages about PSR
3. Number of people that the campaign has reached with messages about gas emergency number

Specific reach targets across all messages:

Social media engagement – engagements include any interaction with content

- End of March 22: 500
- End of March 23: 1000
- Total: 1500

Social Media reach

- End of March 22: 500,000
- End of March 23: 1 million
- Total: 1.5 million

Media engagement – number of media clippings, reach

- End of March 22: 50 clippings, 15 million
- End of March 23: 100 clippings, 50 million
- Total: 150 clippings, 65 million

Email engagement – reach

- End of March 22: 5,000
- End of March 23: 10,000
- Total: 15,000

Number of visits to the CO, PSR and gas safety page on NGN website

- End of March 22: 1000
- End of March 23: 2000
- Total: 3000

Co survey completions

Number of people that have completed CO awareness survey

- End of March 22: 500
- End of March 23: 1000
- Total: 1500

Measuring increase in understanding of co through survey

Increase in understanding of CO post engagement measured by CO awareness survey

- Track through pre-discussion CO awareness score and post-discussion CO awareness score
- Aim for minimum 50% increase in understanding

Number of PSR / CO / gas safety champions recruited

We plan on at least one from each of the groups below:

- Non-English first language
- Rural
- Elderly – Age UK worker as well as elderly
- Pregnant – Bounty – content in app, pregnancy packs, PSR, Jake Quickenden
- Mother / toddler / Midwife

- Disabled
- Student

- End of March 22: 20
- End of March 23: 40
- Total: 40

5.2 Success criteria

- Measurable increase in reach on key messages around PSR, CO Awareness and 0800 number.
- Increase in number of sign-ups to PSR via NGN platforms. Increased awareness around CO safety

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Harvey and Hugo are an integrated communications agency specialising in PR and strategic campaigns who are partnering with NGN for this project.

7. Potential for new learning

Details of what the GDN(s) expect to learn and how the learning will be disseminated.

This agency has been appointed to trial new approaches and methods of communication, focusing on hard-to-reach communities, using disruptive tactics and targeted campaigns. We will also work with stakeholders, including other GDN's and utilities

8. Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations

The Funding Licensee(s) should justify the scale of the VCMA Project – including the scale of the investment relative to its potential benefits. As part of this, it should provide the SROI calculation.

This project has a positive SROI return.

VCMA Project start and end date

Detail start and end date of the VCMA Project and, where relevant, the VCMA Project that preceded this initiative.

Starting November 8th 2021

Ending March 31st 2023

Geographic area

Details of where the VCMA Project will take place. If the VCMA Project is collaborative, the Funding Licensee area(s) in which the project will take place should be identified.

Network-wide

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director