

Highfield Co-op (Bradford) - Community STEM Events

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	July 2021
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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

There are vulnerable communities such as refugees, low income families, elderly and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities within the Bradford District who are not represented within STEM jobs and have a low intake of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses at college and university. The project is aimed at inspiring vulnerable communities to learn about the benefits of STEM courses. This project is being supported as our social indicator mapping research has indicated that there are 9,646 people unemployed in the Bradford area and 13,455 claiming benefits in this area. This research suggests the NGN area has a higher proportion of both unemployment and benefit claimants than nationally and places with pronounced concentrations on both measures include Bradford.

1.1 The solution

Highfield CO-OP aim to get young people interested in STEM-related careers. They want to provide a supportive environment where young people from deprived and often difficult backgrounds, can become informed about the opportunities potentially available to them. These are opportunities that they may never have considered before. The project will focus in delivering STEM events and open days.

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:

- Mitigate the lack of opportunity experienced by young people from low income and ethnic minority communities
- Increase interest in STEM-related careers among vulnerable groups by portraying science, technology, engineering, and maths in an interesting light, so that it will give rise to an impulse to explore
- Provide information on a pathway for getting into a STEM-related careers, to make the possibility more realistic

2.2 Scope

- Organise two STEM events / community information days
- Provide a space for young people with similar interests to meet each other and support each other, in particular, in pursuing a STEM-related career
- Providing advice and information about STEM-related careers, to work towards narrowing educational and income disparities, between BAME young people and other disadvantaged groups
- The geographical area of Bradford and Keighley

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 the VCMA funding, as it will support customers in vulnerable situations, in particular, customers in financial hardship and low incomes due to lack of skills and opportunities. The pandemic has had a significant impact on education and future opportunities and this further impacts the ability to secure jobs. This project aligns to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy around financial hardship and mental health. As this is heavily focussed on education, it also aligns with NGN's Social Mobility Pledge Opportunity Action Plan and addresses some of the findings in social indicator mapping research commissioned by NGN.

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

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- NGN have calculated that this project will have a positive SROI for customers
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the financial and mental health themes as well as the Social Mobility Pledge
- Has defined outcomes as required (see outcomes section)
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms

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 was a key factor in our 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 2019 – 2020

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. This includes digital engagement in light of CV-19. During 2019-2020 we held multiple workshops with our stakeholders on the subject of CIVS.

In our July 2020 workshop, stakeholders discussed new emerging issues under social mobility due to Covid-19, what the impact of the pandemic has on hidden vulnerability and how the current pandemic has impacted demand for essential services to support CIVS. Our stakeholders told us some of the main impacts have been associated with mental health issues around isolation, lack of jobs due to redundancies, home-schooling concerns and other educational challenges. Many young people from disadvantaged and BAME backgrounds, have been significantly impacted by not being able to attend school, college or university.

In the CV-19 specific workshop held in August 2020, our stakeholders also identified that the education issue and home schooling, has created even more of an education gap for disadvantaged children and young people. Some vulnerable children and young adults will have received little or no education during lockdown, due to lack of access to services, the internet and technology which are provided in the school, college and university environments. This has therefore significantly impacted social, literacy and development skills.

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 Social Indicator Mapping, Covid 19 Research and Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT)

Academic research social indicator mapping took place in 2019 and further research around CV-19 impact was undertaken in July 2020. 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. This has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues. Feedback from our social indicator mapping research indicated that Bradford has high areas of deprivation and unemployment. It also indicated that households in the NGN area did not have anybody who spoke English as their main language – approx. 66,000 households in total. This proportion rises to 7% in Bradford. 5.6% of the population within the NGN area have literacy skills at entry level 1 or below – nearly double the national average. The proportion of customers in the NGN area from an ethnic minority varies massively by locality however, this figure is around 25% in Bradford.

Specifically, in relation to this project Highfield Co-op are bespoke to the region of Bradford/Keighley. This community group has extensive reach into those customers living in vulnerable situations and in desperate need of support. This project works with vulnerable groups in the community who are not represented in STEM jobs and have a low intake of STEM courses at college and university. The project aim is to inspire vulnerable communities to learn benefits of STEM courses. This area also has a high prevalence of communities whereby English is not their first language which is an additional challenge experienced by this group.

4.4 Social Mobility Pledge / Opportunity Action Plan (OAP)

NGN has partnered with the Right Honourable Justine Greening to develop an Opportunity Action Plan as part of the Social Mobility Pledge. The challenges in many communities around deprivation have become deeper and more pronounced due to Covid-19. Boosting social mobility is not only about creating opportunities for people from all backgrounds, it removes barriers too. NGN's OAP enables us to go further in increasing opportunities and support in local communities. The action plan addresses the fact that Bradford is one of the areas facing challenges in terms of social mobility, ie identified as a 'cold spot'. NGN are therefore prioritising that area for support around education and literacy and another reason why this project has been awarded funding.

For the youth life stage, Bradford South ranks as one of the lowest performing areas in the country, at 478th out of 533 areas. 85% of young people are eligible for free school meals but end up in positive destinations. The average points per entry for young people in Bradford eligible for free school meals taking A-Level or relevant qualifications, is 22 compared to the national average of 26. While the number of young people eligible for free school meals obtaining two or more A-Levels (or equivalent) by the age of 19 in Bradford is only 28% compared to the national average of 34%. The median weekly salary in Bradford South is £372, compared to a national median of £443 across England; while 31% of jobs in Bradford South pay less than the living wage, compared to 25% nationally.

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. The themes of financial vulnerability and mental health as part of this project, align to NGN's vulnerability strategy.

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

- 25 young people enrolled on training /education in STEM related courses
- 230 young people attending the events equates to 30 hours spent with them
- The existing volunteers who are from the locality, will have increased skills and new volunteers will be recruited from the deprived areas and be given new opportunities
- 12 new volunteers

5.2 Success criteria

The success of this project will be trying to inspire communities, to be creative and organise STEM events in local community settings, to attract interest and get young people thinking about STEM. In particular, females from low income and ethnic minority backgrounds. With the ultimate aim to secure jobs in STEM roles.

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

This project partners will be Bradford College, University of Bradford, Keighley College and Craven College.

7. Potential for new learning

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

The learning will include finding out about the specific challenges experienced by young people from BAME and disadvantaged backgrounds that prevents them from progressing into STEM roles, in particular, those who are female. Working with educational partners to find answers to the solutions for those challenges and create tools of engagement, that can be used and developed to inspire young people. Any learning will be shared with other BAME and disadvantaged young people across NGN's geographical footprint.

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.

The events, which will include engagement and positive interactions means this project has been calculated as having 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.

1st August 2021 – 31st March 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.

This project will take place in Bradford and Keighley

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director