

Yorkshire Energy Doctor (YED) - Community Energy Ambassadors

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	01 April 2021
Project contact name:	Jill Walker
Project contact number/email:	JWalker@northerngas.co.uk
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

Many schemes exist that can support vulnerable households with their energy bills and with being warm, well and safe at home. However, there are numerous barriers to:

- Getting information on these schemes to the people who would most benefit
- Motivating and enabling those individuals to then take-up the help available and in doing so, apply for grants, switch supplier, access energy efficiency improvements and sign up to the PSR.

One of the biggest barriers is distrust and apprehension around any support available that is to do with energy. This may have arisen through experiences of companies cold calling about switching energy supplier or 'free' boilers, hearing news of energy companies going bust, and being continually warned to be aware of potential scams. As a result, many people stick with what they know, whether it be a cold home or high energy costs, purely for peace of mind, no hassle and no worries. This means that vulnerable households are potentially missing out on ways to a) reduce their worries around energy bills and b) be warmer, safer and more comfortable at home.

1.1 The solution

The project aims to support vulnerable residents by using trusted social networks within communities, to cascade information and to enable local action to apply for funding/grants and fuel switching, as well as being given safety information around the dangers of CO. Trusted local networks within communities, will help to address the apprehension around help and support available, in relation to energy. The people within these local networks will attend training courses, to gain the appropriate knowledge, to be able to convey key energy and safety information, to the communities they reach.

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 Shared Purpose

The project aim is to work through existing social and community networks to tackle fuel poverty, cold homes and high energy costs, in communities served by Northern Gas Networks.

2.2 The objectives of this initiative are:

- Provide fuel poverty and energy awareness training to key individuals within local communities, so they are equipped to spread the word on energy matters to friends, family, neighbours and through other social networks
- Generate financial savings to households on their energy bills
- Make homes warmer by improving energy efficiency
- Take steps to ensure residents are safe and well in their homes

- Raise awareness of schemes available to help residents with their energy costs
- Signpost households to other local support services

2.3 Scope

- Time spent with residents – 265 hours
- Offering one-to-one advice based on referrals from our Community Energy Ambassadors
- Covers all of NGN geographical area
- Provide Carbon Monoxide (CO) and energy awareness sessions for frontline staff, using pre and post questionnaires

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 potentially benefit a wide range of vulnerable groups. All of these groups align to the overarching themes of NGN's Vulnerability Strategy – physical and mental disabilities, rural isolation, financial and transient vulnerabilities.

Groups reached:

- Older generation
- Carers
- Residents with a learning disability
- Residents with a physical disability
- Visually impaired
- Families with children under 5
- Rurally isolated households
- Gypsies and Travellers
- Refugees
- Low income households/unemployed

This is very important, as individuals within these vulnerable groups are, to varying degrees:

- More likely to be in fuel poverty
- Likely to be at home more with higher heating demands
- Less likely to shop around to get the cheapest energy rates
- More vulnerable if there was an interruption to gas (or electricity) supply

The funding would enable YED to not just deliver training courses, but to continue to work with a new network of Community Energy Ambassadors going forward. This would be through regular campaigns, events for client groups and support with one-to-one queries and issues. This is all with the ultimate aim of mitigating fuel poverty, reducing anxiety around utility costs and ensuring all of these vulnerable groups have affordable warmth within the home, which will also improve mental well-being.

The project also runs campaigns around the Warm Home Discount and Priority Services Register (PSR) and also promotes training and mini-awareness initiatives around CO. It aligns to a number of NGN's Vulnerability Strategy themes however, the main one being addressed is financial hardship.

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

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- This project will have a positive SROI
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning directly with the financial hardship theme
- Has defined outcomes as required (see outcomes section)
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms
- Reaches a broad range of vulnerable groups

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 due to Covid-19, what the impact of the pandemic has on hidden vulnerability and how the current pandemic impacted demand for essential services to support CIVS. Our stakeholders told us some of the main impacts have been associated with an increase in fuel and food poverty and there is a greater need than ever, to support customers accessing fuel and food banks. In the CV-19 specific workshop held in August 2020, our stakeholders also identified that larger energy bills was an issue due to the pandemic. They stated that larger energy bills were due to spending more time at home, especially those less mobile and shielding. However, a further challenge which compounded this problem, was

not being able to contact energy suppliers to discuss these issues. Access to other essential services also significantly decreased and stakeholders also told us that demand for energy advice dropped however, more general enquiries were prevalent around redundancy and benefits.

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.

4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support CIVS. 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 CIVS which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

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

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 vulnerability mapping tool has been demonstrated to stakeholders to highlight any vulnerability gaps we have on our network. The VMT 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 includes fuel poverty hotspots and has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues.

Feedback from our social indicator mapping research indicated that unemployment and the claimant of benefits is higher in the NGN area than nationally. Places with pronounced concentrations on both measures include Bradford, Hull and urban areas in the North East such as Hartlepool, South Tyne, Middlesbrough and Sunderland. The research also indicates that 17% of people in our network are unemployed. The fact that there were 12,835 excess winter deaths in the NGN area, with the proportion above expected highest in Hartlepool and across the East Riding patch indicates that fuel poverty is an influencing factor and this was highlighted as being over 365,000 (12.8%) in the NGN area. The proportion rises to around 14% in the Tees and Wear patches and is highest in Middlesbrough (17%). People living in fuel poverty often have to choose between heating or eating. As a consequence of this and due to financial hardship, (further compounded by the pandemic) the repair, maintenance and replacement of gas appliances is not a priority for this group. The impact of this, is an increased risk of CO poisoning from the appliances that aren't working correctly and to standard. Refugee and traveller communities form part of the demographic of NGN's network and energy related issues for those groups in particular, pose a greater challenge and concern due to language and cultural barriers. For example, many refugee communities tend to live in poor housing stock which can be linked to fuel poverty.

NGN recently commissioned some research around CO and PSR. Some, if not all of the top actions from that research, will be addressed by supporting this project:

- Target increasing awareness of the dangers of CO

- Increase understanding of what CO actually
- Encourage people to get a CO alarm
- Encourage people to test their alarms
- Increase awareness of the PSR – over half of respondents were not aware of the PSR

CV-19 research commissioned by NGN in June 2020, highlighted the conclusions below. This provides further evidence to support YED’s 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.

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 theme of financial hardship in this project aligns 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

- 10 Community Energy Ambassador courses
- Average of 10 attendees per course = 100 Community Energy Ambassadors trained up
- Each to share information with at least 10 people = reach of 1,000 residents
- Cost savings to residents
- PSR signups = 100
- CO awareness to 150 households – including pre and post questionnaires

5.2 Success criteria

- Savings are generated by actions such as switching energy supplier, applying for the Warm Home Discount, applying for grants to clear energy debts and accessing grants for new boilers or insulation
- Feedback forms
- 25% of our Ambassadors to send in a feedback form and each to have spoken to 10 customers on ways to save energy in the home

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

The project courses will be run with a Community Development Worker. This is important to ensure that the Ambassadors aren't just providing information on energy support schemes but that they are also thinking about how to engage, inspire and motivate households to consider taking action in the first place.

The course will be offered widely to community groups and voluntary sector organisations across all of NGN's geographic area. Going forward, the project will look to work with our new partner organisations on tailored initiatives that will benefit their clients.

7. Potential for new learning

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

The project will assess how effective working through trusted community partners is, in terms of reaching vulnerable households and what are the best approaches identified by Ambassadors. This learning can then be shared with other NGN partners and organisations.

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.

1st April 2021 – 31.03.2023

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.

The project will cover all of NGN's geographical area

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director