

Highfield Co-op (Bradford) - Vulnerability Film Festivals - Using Film To identify vulnerable Communities

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	March 2024
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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 within the Bradford district who may not be aware of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning and the efficient use of fuel and energy, such as refugees, low income families, elderly and BAME communities. Many refugees arriving in the United Kingdom face multiple health challenges. Some refugees' health issues result from experiences in their home countries; others may develop once they arrive and this can lead to individuals living with addictions. Because refugees generally live in low-income housing, one concern can be the impact on health (physical and mental) from living in poor housing (cold/damp homes) which can increase the risk of fuel poverty. Even when living in safe housing however, refugees who lack experience with western-style homes and are from different cultural backgrounds, may be at greater risk. In addition, limited English and literacy skills may prevent some refugee families from learning how to safely use and maintain their new homes. This has the potential to lead to the risk of CO poisoning from appliances, as they may be unsure of how to safely maintain these and may be unaware of the signs and symptoms of CO poisoning. There is a big gap in knowledge within these different cultures, especially around heating and cooking, in terms of CO awareness. This project is aimed at low income, BAME and eastern European people within the community, who are living with addictions. Many refugees in the United Kingdom face multiple health challenges. Having complex needs such as mental health and addiction challenges, as well as financial hardship, makes it even more difficult to engage with this group.

1.1 The solution

Highfield Co-op aim to work closely with these different cultures and vulnerable communities to raise awareness of CO poisoning, including the signs and symptoms and to provide advice around fuel and energy in the home. Highfield Co-op will run a film festival to attract people from vulnerable groups and the content will be around the issues affecting them, in particular, around energy usage and CO awareness. The aim is to show multiple films over a year, in the Bradford and surrounding areas. The messages in the films will help them understand the dangers of CO and to support them in accessing information around energy and using fuel efficiently. The films will start conversations around fuel poverty and to find solutions on how to deal with fuel poverty, for people with mental health needs and living with addictions. For example, a film may involve the theme of fuel poverty and related issues, such as the need for energy-saving advice or switching, what steps to take and how to access help. Highfield Co-op have access to these groups and are a trusted intermediary within the community, who can reach those who could potentially fall through the gaps. They operate at grass roots level and are therefore able to access ambassadors and key contacts within these diverse and hard to reach groups. The films will be produced in conjunction with UNESCO Bradford City of Film.

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

This project aims to deliver clear and effective messaging around the risks of CO poisoning, including signs and symptoms and energy efficiency/ fuel usage, by showing films at a festival within Bradford.

2.2 The objectives of this initiative are:

- Provide carbon monoxide (CO) awareness information to vulnerable customers
- Provide advice around energy saving
- Bring people from vulnerable groups together to have conversations around energy-saving and CO awareness
- Use film as a tool of education, to inform and begin conversations around issues specifically affecting low income, eastern European and other BAME groups
- Use events to identify vulnerable customers and provide information about energy and CO, whilst signposting to other support as and when required
- Utilise other film festivals as potential tools for identifying vulnerable customers, providing information and signposting

2.3 Scope

- 13 volunteers involved per annum
- 1 film festival / 10 films to be shown per annum
- Messages specifically around energy and CO
- 150 CO pre and post surveys per annum
- 65 PSR registrations per annum
- Geographical area of Bradford

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 support vulnerable customers with mental health challenges / addictions from different cultural backgrounds, who may not be aware of the dangers of CO, energy and fuel usage. Some people may have recently arrived from war torn countries as refugees. There is a significant gap in knowledge within refugee and other culturally diverse communities around the dangers of CO poisoning and energy efficiency/fuel poverty. This project seeks to take advantage of a unique opportunity, to access these hard to reach groups and provide important and potentially life-saving information, to vulnerable customers through the use of film. As the project has a mental disability theme it aligns with NGN'S Vulnerability Strategy, as does the energy saving element, which will ultimately result in financial savings.

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

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- As this project is around CO awareness and reducing the risk of harm caused by CO, it aligns with the eligibility criteria. The project also supports NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with mental and financial vulnerability themes
- The challenges around language barriers and communication in the Bradford area, also aligns with the physical vulnerability theme
- 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 for customers

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

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. Since 2019 we've held regular workshops with our stakeholders, on the subject of Customers In Vulnerable Situations (CIVS). This ensures that we are well informed to address the needs of customers across our network and through collaborative projects.

Stakeholder engagement throughout 2022, told us that fuel poverty and the choice between heating and eating is becoming more prevalent. The energy and cost of living crises have further compounded this issue. This project provides a solution to helping those customers who are financially struggling and need extra help to address energy affordability. The project fully aligns with the need to help vulnerable customers in fuel poverty.

Recent social indicator mapping research carried out in June 2022, indicated that Bradford, Hull, Scarborough, South Tyneside, and Sunderland were the top five places, to emerge as having the

greatest concentration of vulnerabilities within NGN's network. This was based on a combination of the following vulnerability factors:

- Fuel poverty
- Benefit claims
- No qualifications
- Long term health problem / disability

Our most recent stakeholder engagement during 2023 has informed us that financial hardship is still a key area of focus, alongside the health impacts associated with, or exacerbated by, living in cold and damp homes. Stakeholders also told us that increasing capacity for support within services would be key to addressing the immediate and longer term impacts of fuel poverty and energy affordability. This project addresses this need and ensures additional capacity to support households who may be at risk, through a well-established and trusted advice service.

Each year we use our annual Customer Perceptions Research to understand the priorities of our customers. Amongst a set of general tracker questions i.e., same questions that are asked year on year, the evidence in the most recent research (March 2023), indicated that keeping bills as low as possible ranked more highly, than providing a safe and reliable supply of gas. This is a clear indication, as to how concerned customers are about the cost of energy and the subsequent impact this will have on other bills. Customers were also asked to prioritise the list of vulnerabilities listed below:

- Mental wellbeing
- Rurality
- Temporary vulnerability
- Physical challenges
- Financial Hardship

This was the order of priority from the customers surveyed:

- Financial Hardship
- Physical challenges
- Mental wellbeing
- Rurality
- Temporary vulnerability
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Financial hardship continued to be the dimension of vulnerability that most customers prioritised, with more customers in the most recent survey selecting this as their top priority. Physical challenges were second, closely followed by Mental well-being third. Rurality and Temporary vulnerability were ranked fourth and fifth.

Very recent (Autumn 2023) Bespoke Vulnerability Stakeholder Mapping research identified categories of stakeholders that are hard to reach, this included:

- People living with a disability
- Senior citizens with long term conditions
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Mental health

Health conditions which are prevalent in the NGN region are:

- Cancer and chronic kidney disease
- Musculoskeletal conditions
- Respiratory

- Mental health

Through the research carried out, the findings show that the 5 original NGN vulnerability categories have now evolved to 10 categories. These are:

1. Physical challenges, inclusive of communication issues, physical space
2. Mental wellbeing
3. Financial hardship
4. Temporary vulnerability – including post hospital recovery and pregnancy / maternity
5. Socio Demographic
6. Household composition
7. Rural Vulnerability
8. Accessibility Including language
9. Medical Dependant on Energy
10. Cultural

4.2 The Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support our customers in vulnerable situations (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. The introduction of a dedicated role to support VCMA projects has been welcomed by the ISG.

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 to answer complicated questions, e.g. see where there are a high number of culturally diverse people living in low, energy efficient housing and in fuel poverty. This has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues.

Social indicator mapping research highlighted that Bradford has a high prevalence of communities whereby English is not their first language and therefore lots of diverse groups with many cultural differences, including refugee communities. This further complicates the matter when trying to convey key safety and energy efficiency/fuel poverty messages. This research also indicated that there are 9,646 people unemployed in the Bradford area and 13,455 claiming benefits in this area, therefore financial hardship is a major issue. Over 365,000 (12.8%) people experience fuel poverty in the NGN area, 31,706 of which are from the Bradford area.

Further feedback from our social indicator mapping research, indicated that Bradford had a high number of CO jobs attended by NGN. Recent CO research undertaken by NGN, found that increasing awareness of the dangers of CO was a priority in Bradford. It highlighted that only 32% of respondents in Bradford recognise that CO can kill you and 20% of respondents rate their awareness of CO as 5 out of 10 or lower. 34% of respondents did not feel their awareness had increased over the past few years. 33% of the people who responded in Bradford did not have a CO alarm in their home and only 29% of respondents test their alarm annually. From the same research, the number

of respondents who have a disc which changes colour when CO is present is highest in Bradford. The concern here is that a disc is no longer a recommended option. Any awareness raising around the silent killer of CO, will have a positive impact and address some of the issues highlighted by the research. The list below summarises the top actions for Bradford, identified from the CO research

- Target increasing awareness of the dangers of
- Increase understanding of what CO actually is
- Encourage people to get a CO
- Encourage people to test their alarms

CV-19 research commissioned by NGN in June 2020, highlighted the wider conclusions below. This provides further evidence to support Highfield Co-op's film 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 themes of mental, physical and financial vulnerability within the 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

- 1 film festival lasting 2 months per year
- 380 attendees per year
- 13 volunteers involved per annum
- 1 film festival / 10 films to be shown per annum
- Messages specifically around energy and CO
- 150 CO pre and post surveys per annum
- 65 PSR registrations per annum
- Geographical area of Bradford
- 40 hours spent per annum with attendees to discuss energy issues

5.2 Success criteria

- All vulnerable customers referred will have a greater understanding of the importance of gas safety and the dangers associated with Carbon Monoxide
- Customers will also have an awareness of how to save energy and
- Evaluation and collecting data about how many people attend the film festival

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

This project will work with UNESCO City of Film to deliver the film festival.

7. Potential for new learning

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

Using a different approach that includes films to ignite conversations and break down barriers and offer support. An opportunity to learn how films can inspire change and unite communities. Any learning will be shared with NGN, for further cascade into similar communities within 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.

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 2023 – 31st March 2026

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