

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:	March 2024
Project contact name:	Laura Ratcliffe
Project contact number/email:	LRatcliffe@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 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

2.2 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.

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 group

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

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 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 rural 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

- 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.

Any learning will be shared with stakeholders, including GDN's, DNO's and water companies

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.

April 2023 – 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.

The project will cover all of NGN's geographical area

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director