

Insights from National Grid's 2024 Birmingham forum

In November, National Grid hosted their final two in-person community energy forums of the year, in Birmingham and Swansea. Below is a summary of the proceedings and discussion of the Birmingham event



These community energy forums form part of a series of six events (two online and four in-person) that Regen has delivered this year for National Grid as part of its programme of community energy support.

The agenda for these events was formed both from previous event feedback and wider changes going on in the sector, such as the formation of GB Energy and the proposals around their Local Power Plan. Below is a summary of the proceedings and discussions of the Birmingham event. To see the companion piece for the Swansea event, click [here](#).

The agenda for the Birmingham event featured a focus on fuel poverty, community engagement, funding and innovation opportunities.

Learning from our communities

Rachel Moffat, coordinator of [Bristol Energy Network](#) (BEN) travelled up to Birmingham to give an insight into the work the Network has been doing around fuel poverty. This included detailing the major impact their [Energy Help Desk](#) project has had in building individuals' understanding of energy usage and behaviour, the [Energy Champions programme](#) that offers locals the chance to receive training around energy efficiency measures and fuel poverty, and touching upon the [Just Transition declaration](#) that BEN helped write for Bristol City Council.

Workshops: Writing a funding application

Ruth Mulvany of the [Midlands Net Zero Hub](#) gave a detailed workshop on good bid writing. This workshop included general guidance and an interactive exercise in which attendees took on the role of a scoring panel, evaluating sample applications and offering feedback on potential submissions. Some of the general guidance for bid writing included:

- 1. Targeting the right funder** rather than trying to shape your project to fit certain criteria
- 2. Crafting a compelling application**, making sure applications are devoid of jargon

3. **Think about the factors the funders are looking for**, including clear goals, showing your project addresses a clear need, and that you've communicated your passion and views
4. **Budgeting and financial transparency**, it's important to ensure the project budget is laid out comprehensively and accurately
5. **Final review**, re-evaluate the application thoroughly before sending it off.

Workshop: Effective community engagement

This Regen-run workshop began with a presentation on effective methods for reaching and engaging the wider community. You can read more about the engagement methods suggested in this workshop on page 12 of [National Grid's guide on community heat](#).

Participants then delved into a community engagement scenario and discussed some of the different approaches to engagement that they might take.

The main points of the discussion included:

- Noting there are **significant resources and funding** are needed to undertake community engagement properly and that engagement should start as early as possible
- That it is challenging to reach residents in **rural areas** and these areas are increasingly fragmented socially
- That **traditional engagement methods have often been replaced by newer platforms** like WhatsApp, and in some cases, community networks are absent.

Workshop: Creating innovative projects to generate social value

Kate Copeland-Rhodes of [Staffordshire Community Energy](#) ran an in-depth workshop on social value, how we explore creating it, and how doughnut economics can help inform this action.

The group discussed:

- **How to view social value**, looking at frameworks such as the Social Value Model framework to try and attribute a financial indication to social value
- **Doughnut economics**, which looks at systems in terms of planetary and social indicators and aims for a society that meets needs on both ends
- **How community energy can connect some of the dots between boosting local economies, providing social value and taking climate action**. The [Keep Warm. Keep Well](#) scheme that Staffordshire Community Energy has been helping run with the NHS trusts in its area was used as an example case study.

How can GB Energy support the development of community energy in England?

In both the Swansea and Birmingham forums, a session of the day was given over to discuss some of the challenges that the community energy sector is currently facing, and how GB Energy might play a role in helping overcome these challenges. Attendees were encouraged to engage in 'blue-sky thinking' and feedback on all potential solutions, with the idea being that with GB Energy still very much in its infancy, now is the time to make an ambitious case for community energy support to government. You can see the summarised findings of these sessions [here](#).