

Electricity Network Innovation - events report

London and Newcastle

November 2017



Engaging Communities in Network Innovation – events report

Newcastle and London

Regen ran two events on Electricity Network Innovation in partnership with the ENA and DNOs in November 2017. This report summarises the events, feedback and recommendations for further engagement with communities on network innovation.

- Aim of event
- Marketing
- Feedback
- Recommendations

Aims

- To enable communities and local organisations to learn about network innovation projects and to understand opportunities for them to engage and participate.
- To enable DNOs to hear from communities and local organisations on how best to engage them in network innovation projects.
- To bring together the DNOs to share learning on engagement on each other's innovation projects.
- To produce a simple best practice in network innovation guide that is useful to communities and smaller players (post event, due for early 2018)



Marketing and promotion

Marketing was carried out primarily through Regen's networks, which include over 250 communities registered as part of our community network and a further 10,000 contacts who've an interest in distributed generation and sustainability. Each DNO was asked to post the events on their websites and invite their networks. We developed effective working relationships with partners such as Community Energy England, Wales and Scotland to help us to promote the events.

In the north where community networks aren't as strong, more intensive marketing was required and Regen used a range of different methods such as social media and desk based research to find individual groups who were then contacted over the phone, or email.

Examples of our activities

- Directed mailouts – several mass mailouts to our full community database, over 700 people
- Mentions in newsletters and community mailouts – including our own community updates, our wider Regen market insight reports and others
- Phone calls and individual emails - contacted over 200 individual people over the phone and via personal email
- Tweets - Seven times a week through two twitter channels – frequency of tweets increased as we approached the event
- Promotion via Community Energy England/Community Energy Scotland/ Community Energy Wales newsletters and tweets
- Promotion via various partners including Transition Network, Carbon Co-op, Community Energy South, Birmingham Community Energy, Renew Wales, Local Energy Network, Vonne and others
- Promotion at our own community energy and industry focused events including the CEE community energy conference in June.

Overall the events have been popular and well attended. The London event was particularly popular with community groups and stakeholders.

London

82 people attended London (14 no shows)

At the point of booking delegates were asked to say where they heard about the event. In London the 3 main ways were through Regen, Word of Mouth and through Community Energy England newsletter.

You can view the presentations from the events [here](#).

"Jodie Giles of @RSWcommunities rounding up what has been a fascinating event on innovation in the electricity network"

<https://twitter.com/CarbonCoop/status/925760604433940481>



"Communities clearly going to be integral to smart flexible energy systems"
@ofgem at
@RSWcommunities
@energynetworks
innovation event"
https://twitter.com/emmabridge_1/status/925700169487802369



Newcastle

49 people attended the Newcastle event (16 no shows)

At the point of booking delegates were asked to say where they heard about the event. In Newcastle the top 3 were: email from Regen, Twitter and LinkedIn.

You can view the presentations from the events [here](#).

Tweets from the event:

Great to see @RegenSW spreading their experience from SW to NE!!

<https://twitter.com/topnigel/status/927844133204578310>



@beaylott of @CarbonCoop sharing learning from their award winning work at @RSWcommunities innovation event

<https://twitter.com/Comm1nrg/status/927863643584294912>

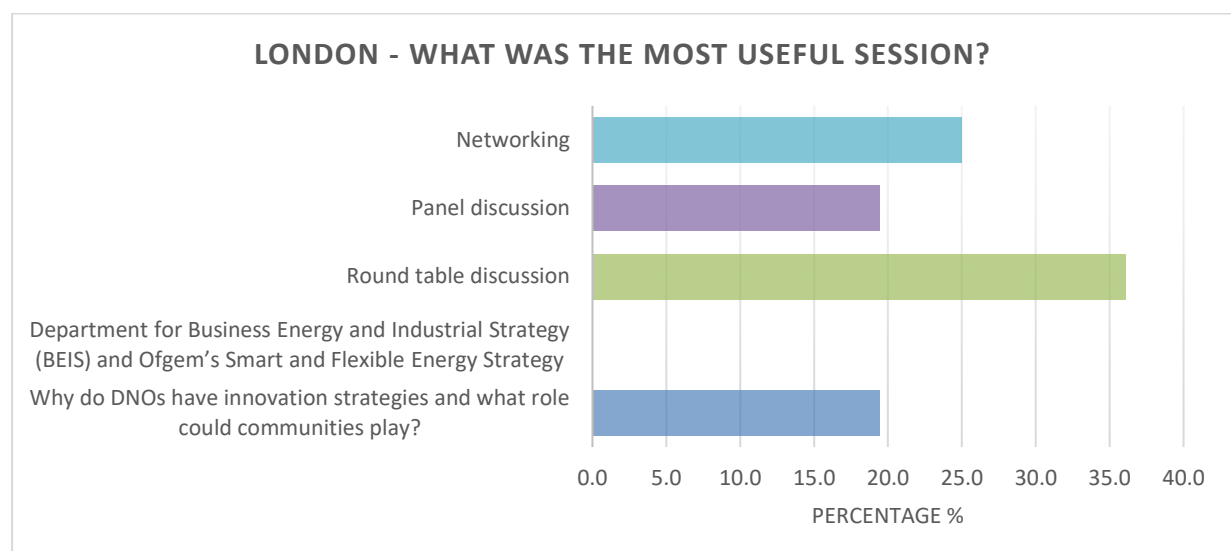
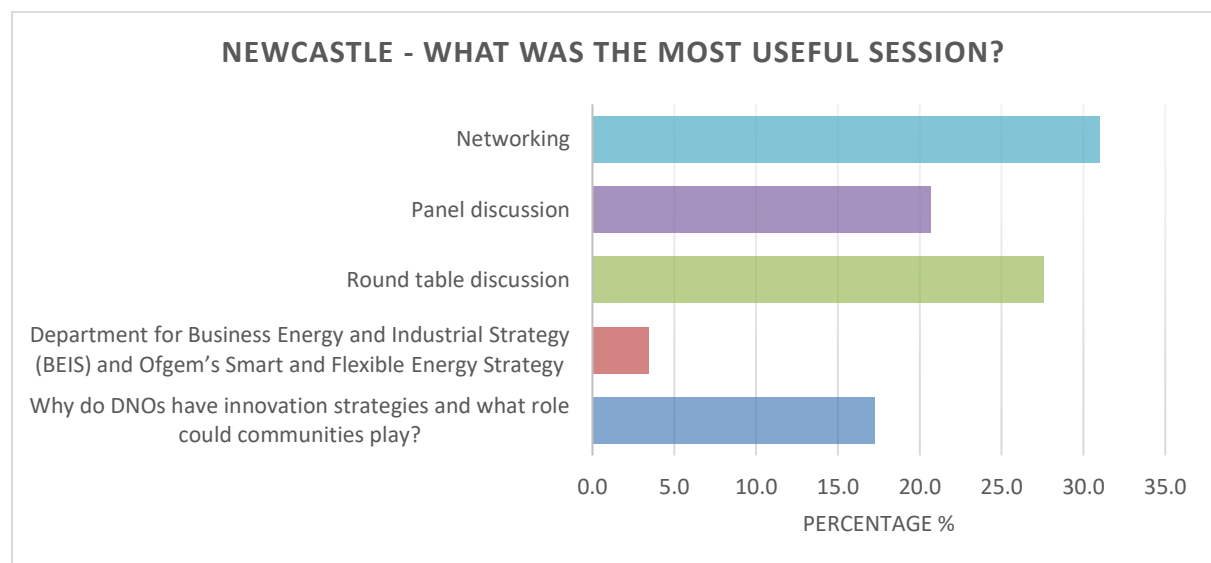


Event feedback

We asked the attendees to give feedback at the end of each event, and in post event emails. Overall feedback from these events has been really positive.

Feedback from attendees indicated that at the London event, 100 per cent were either happy or very happy with the event and in Newcastle, 95 percent were happy or very happy.

Participants rated the most useful session to be networking, followed by round table discussions and the panel discussion led by DNOs, “Why do DNOs have innovation strategies and what role could communities play?”.



The least well received session in both locations was the BEIS and Ofgem Smart and Flexible Energy System piece.

Examples of feedback

"Kerry, Just to express again my thanks for the event in London a couple of days ago; it was extremely good and hopefully brought up several new themes for the community participants, as well as the representatives of the DNOs (when do we start calling them DSO?). What stood out for me was the change in attitude of the people from the DNOs and the memory of one of them referring to their organisations as a 'dinosaur'" **Mike Slavin, London event**

"DNOs are as scary as a maternity ward if you have never been in one before. But in every maternity ward there is someone who will welcome you and talk you through what to expect. I would like DNOs to provide that person more" **Andy Herald, Energise Barnsley**

"A great day!". **Liz Reason, Southill, London event**

"Just a quick note congratulating you on a very informative, educational and interesting energy innovation event today in Newcastle. Being able to speak directly with DNOs to understand their challenges and frustration due to lack of proper government strategy and clear roadmap, and to interact with other community energy groups was very enlightening and allowed me to make some great contacts to work with other inspirational community groups." **Maurice Dixon, Westmill Solar, Newcastle event**

"A great, well organised event. Thank you!" **Phil Dunn, Revier Biotech**



Conclusions and Next Steps

Network innovation projects have led to DNOs working much more closely with customers. The shift from DNO to DSO will make this increasingly important as the sector adapts to the changing energy landscape. Community energy groups are ready to be important partners from DNOs in the shift to DSO functions.

We noticed a distinct difference in how advanced the community groups were in the north and south of the country. Community groups in the south seemed to have more experience of energy network innovation and engaging with network issues, whereas in the north the focus was largely on renewable energy generation, how to connect projects, and energy efficiency. This split could be due to differences in the electricity network in different parts of the country and how innovative the groups have had to be in order to overcome network constraints. It could also be down to the stages of development of regional community energy networks.

Next steps

Feedback suggests that community groups valued the opportunity to get together, to meet with the DNOs face to face, and to learn from each other. We would recommend running more events in future, and making the sessions more interactive as the participants valued the workshops and networking highly. These should be integrated into the various



regional community energy networks where possible. We would also advise using a range of other engagement methods, in addition to the post event guide, to reach wider audiences and enable people who cannot attend events to be involved, including:

- **More accessible visual tools.** Feedback, particularly in the North of the country, suggested that location made the events difficult to travel to (ie travelling from Scotland/North West), so tools such as visual minutes that can be shared far and wide would be useful to share learning beyond those who are able to attend events.
- **Short films.** There is an ongoing need to help community stakeholders understand why innovation is necessary and support learning around how the network is changing. Films and short animations can support this education process.
- **Podcasts.** “Electricity Network Inspiration Station”

- **Website support.** At both events comments were made about using both the ENA and individual DNO websites, these could be developed into more community friendly resources.
- **DNO information and case studies made available on the Community Energy Hub website**
- **Seed fund to support communities with innovative ideas**
- **More opportunities to pitch innovation ideas to DNOs,** these could be hosted in each area or at central ENA events, this could be a competitive dragons den format or a friendlier opportunity to pitch an idea over a cuppa.

Summary

Thanks to all the staff at the DNOs and ENA who worked with us on delivering these events, the feedback shows that community and local energy stakeholders really valued the opportunity to meet with their DNOs, share ideas and learn from each other. There is a clear appetite for more face to face engagement and plenty of opportunity to use creative engagement methods beyond events to enable communities to participate in our changing energy system. This will lead to more robust innovation projects and greater awareness and understanding of the role of the DNO. Having delivered this series of events last year and this year, already we are experiencing fewer adversarial stakeholders and a more collaborative and engaged community energy sector.

