



Community Energy

Technical Assistance for Communities

SP Energy Networks Technical Assistance Guide

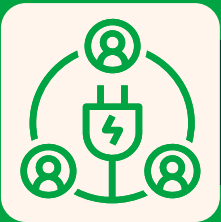
Technical Assistance Guide

This guide has been created to support communities in their pursuit of community energy projects with appropriate technical assistance where required.

It is designed to inform you about the Community Energy Journey, Community Energy more broadly and then give practical guidance on how and when to get technical assistance as you develop your community energy project.

For more information, please visit:
spenergynetworks.co.uk/pages/community_energy





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1. What is SP Energy Networks Community Energy Journey?

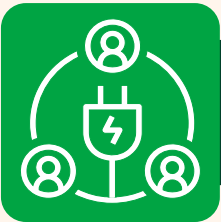
Community energy projects can bring a wide range of benefits to local areas — from generating renewable electricity and reducing carbon emissions to creating income, improving local resilience, and bringing communities together around a shared purpose. However, developing a community energy project can sometimes feel complex, particularly for groups who are at the beginning of their journey.

To help support community groups through this process, SP Energy Networks developed the Community Energy Journey — a step-by-step guide designed to help groups understand the key stages involved in developing a community energy project. The journey has been designed to support communities at different stages of development, from early engagement and idea generation through to feasibility, funding, technical support, and ultimately connecting a project to the electricity network.

The journey combines practical guidance, videos, and supporting resources to help demystify the process and make community energy more accessible. It is not intended to be a rigid pathway, as every project and community is different, but instead provides a flexible framework to help groups understand the questions they may need to consider as their project develops.

These supporting guidance documents have been developed to sit alongside the Community Energy Journey and provide additional detail, examples, and practical advice for each stage of the process.





2. What is Community Energy?

Community energy refers to locally driven energy initiatives such as renewable electricity generation, renewable heat solutions and energy efficiency programmes that are owned, controlled, or delivered by communities for the benefit of local people.

These projects play an important role in supporting the UK’s transition to net zero by enabling low-carbon, decentralised energy solutions while also addressing issues such as fuel poverty and energy security.

By retaining financial benefits within the community and encouraging local participation, community energy schemes help build public engagement, increase acceptance of energy infrastructure, and deliver wider social, environmental, and economic value.

3. What is Technical Assistance and why is it so important?

Community energy and low carbon projects can bring a wide range of benefits to local areas, from reducing energy costs and carbon emissions to improving local resilience and supporting long term sustainability goals. However, developing a project can sometimes feel difficult, particularly where technical information, funding processes, contractors and different technologies are involved.

Technical Assistance refers to the practical support that may be needed as a project develops. This support is intended to help projects move forward with clearer information, better understanding and greater confidence when making decisions.

Every project will be different. Some projects may only need a small amount of early guidance, while others may require ongoing support over a longer period of time. The type of support needed will often depend on the building or site involved, the type of technology being considered, the level of experience within the group, and the stage the project has reached.

Technical Assistance does not replace the role of contractors, consultants or specialist designers. Instead, it can help provide independent support throughout the project journey, helping to explain information, identify possible next steps and support informed decision making.



In community energy and low carbon projects, Technical Assistance can help by:

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Building Understanding: Technical information can sometimes feel unfamiliar or difficult to interpret, especially during the early stages of a project. Support can help explain processes, technologies and terminology in a clearer and more accessible way.
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Supporting Better Decisions: Projects may require important decisions around funding, technologies, buildings and long-term investment. Having access to independent guidance can help ensure that decisions are based on clearer and more balanced information.
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Helping Projects Progress: Projects can sometimes stall where there is uncertainty around costs, technologies, responsibilities or next steps. In some cases, projects may move forward too quickly before key information has been properly understood. This can lead to delays, unexpected costs or difficulties later in the process.
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Reducing Risks and Avoiding Common Problems: Early support can help identify missing information, practical risks or unrealistic expectations before projects progress too far. This can help reduce the likelihood of problems developing later on.
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Building Confidence: Support can help build confidence when engaging with consultants, contractors, planners, funders or network operators, particularly where processes or technical information may feel unfamiliar.
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Supporting Long Term Development: Some projects develop over many months or years. Support may be helpful during feasibility work, funding applications, procurement, installation and project delivery as the project continues to evolve.

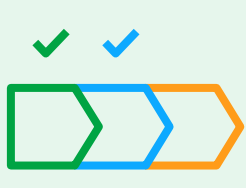
4. Supporting Early Project Development

Many community energy projects begin with a broad idea rather than a fully developed plan. At this stage, there can often be uncertainty around what may be realistic, what technologies may be suitable, or what information may be needed before decisions can be made.

Early support can help provide structure and direction during this part of the process.

This may involve:

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Reviewing existing surveys, reports or technical information
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Discussing possible next steps and future stages of development
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Visiting the building or site to better understand current conditions
- 

Identifying where further surveys or specialist advice may be useful
- 

Identifying practical opportunities that may support the development of the project
- 

Highlighting practical constraints that may affect the project
- 

Helping prioritise actions where budgets or resources may be limited

At this stage, support may simply help improve understanding and confidence before moving further into project development. In other cases, it may help identify whether a project is ready to progress towards feasibility studies, funding applications or more detailed technical work.





5. Understanding different technologies and project options

There is rarely a single solution that works for every project. What may be suitable for one building or community may not be suitable for another. Local priorities, available funding, building constraints and long-term maintenance considerations can all influence which options may be most appropriate.

Support at this stage can help explain the differences between technologies and what they may involve in practice.

This may include:

- Comparing different renewable or low carbon technologies
- Explaining how systems operate and what infrastructure may be required
- Discussing the practical implications and potential benefits of different technologies
- Highlighting practical considerations or installation challenges
- Reviewing maintenance and long-term operational requirements
- Exploring phased approaches to project delivery
- Identifying where further studies or surveys may be needed
- Exploring opportunities for smarter energy use or battery storage
- Understanding how and when energy is used across a site or community
- Considering opportunities for flexible energy use or demand management

This stage can also help address common concerns or misunderstandings around renewable technologies and provide clearer information about how different systems may work in practice. In some cases, improving how and when energy is used may be just as important as increasing energy generation capacity.





6. Understanding grid connections and network capacity

For many renewable energy projects, it is important to understand how a project may connect to the local electricity network and whether there is sufficient capacity available in the area.

This can sometimes feel difficult to navigate, particularly where technical terminology, connection processes or network constraints are unfamiliar.

At this stage, support may help:

- Explain the difference between importing and exporting electricity
- Improve understanding of grid connection processes and requirements
- Help interpret information provided by network operators
- Identify what technical information may be needed before making a formal connection application
- Explain common processes such as G98 and G99 applications
- Explore how local network constraints may affect project options
- Support discussions around export limitations, reinforcement works or connection costs

In some cases, early discussions around grid connections can help identify potential challenges before significant time or funding is committed to project development.

Support at this stage is intended to help projects better understand the process and prepare for discussions with network operators, rather than replace formal connection application procedures.





7. Understanding project ownership and community benefit

Community energy projects can take many different forms depending on how the project is intended to operate and how any benefits may be shared locally.

Some projects may focus mainly on reducing energy costs for a single building or organisation, while others may involve generating electricity that can be used across multiple sites or exported to the electricity network.

At this stage, it can be helpful to better understand how different project approaches may affect the technical development of the project and any longer-term responsibilities involved.

Support at this stage may help:

- Improve understanding of how electricity generated by a project may be used, shared or exported
- Explore how different project structures may affect system design or operation
- Consider long term operation, monitoring and maintenance responsibilities
- Identify what additional technical or specialist advice may be needed as the project develops
- Support discussions around practical delivery arrangements between project partners or building owners

Different projects will have different priorities, resources and long-term goals. Early discussions around how a project may operate can help identify practical considerations before projects move further into development.





8. Understanding land, buildings and site access

For some projects, there may be practical considerations around access to buildings, roof space or land before projects can move forward.

This can sometimes involve multiple organisations, landowners or stakeholders, particularly where projects are being developed across shared or publicly owned spaces.

Support at this stage may help improve understanding of:

- Whether suitable space may be available for the proposed project
- What permissions or agreements may be needed before works can progress
- Access arrangements for installation or future maintenance
- Responsibilities between project partners, building owners or delivery teams
- Local planning or site restrictions that may affect project development
- Whether additional specialist advice may be required before progressing further

In some cases, projects may experience delays where access arrangements, permissions or responsibilities have not yet been clearly established.

Identifying these considerations early can help projects better understand what additional steps may be needed before delivery can move forward.



9. Feasibility study support and further investigations

As projects become more developed, there may be a need for further technical or financial investigation before decisions can be made with confidence.

Feasibility studies are often used to help explore whether a proposed project may be practical, achievable and suitable for the site or community involved.

Support at this stage is not intended to replace detailed feasibility work carried out by specialist consultants. Instead, it can help projects better understand what a feasibility study may involve, what information may be needed beforehand, and how findings may be interpreted once completed.

Support at this stage may help:

- Identify what information may still be missing before further studies are commissioned
- Improve understanding of what a feasibility study is intended to assess
- Help identify useful questions or areas that may need further investigation
- Support preparation for discussions with specialist consultants
- Review or help explain technical findings following completion of a study
- Help identify possible next steps following feasibility work

This stage can help projects feel better prepared before progressing into more detailed technical investigations or design stages.



10. Reviewing technical advice and project information

As projects develop, technical information from consultants, suppliers or contractors can sometimes become difficult to interpret, particularly where there are multiple reports, differing opinions or unfamiliar terminology involved.

Independent support can help explain this information in a more accessible way and identify where further clarification may be useful.

This may include:

- Reviewing technical reports, surveys or feasibility studies
- Explaining drawings, specifications or contractor proposals
- Clarifying technical terminology or assumptions
- Helping compare different recommendations or project approaches
- Highlighting where further clarification may be useful
- Helping identify questions to ask consultants or suppliers

In some cases, this type of support can simply help provide reassurance and improve confidence before decisions are made.

Support may be provided through meetings, desktop reviews, written comments or ongoing advisory discussions as projects progress.





11. Technical risk and project review support

All projects involve some level of risk, and it is often useful to identify potential challenges early so they can be better understood and managed.

Technical Assistance can help review possible risks associated with proposed works, technologies or project delivery approaches.

This may include considering:

- Technical or operational risks
- Possible planning or approval issues
- Impacts on buildings or surrounding areas
- Maintenance and long-term management considerations
- Practical installation challenges
- Risks associated with project delivery or procurement

Support at this stage may help projects better understand possible risks, identify areas that may require further attention and improve confidence before projects move forward.

This stage is often useful during project design and development, particularly before procurement or installation works begin.





12. Helping projects overcome challenges

Not all projects progress in a straight line. It is common for projects to experience delays, uncertainty or changing priorities as development work progresses.

Support can be particularly useful where:

- There is uncertainty around the next steps
- Costs or technical challenges have changed
- Additional funding or evidence may be required
- Different stakeholders have conflicting views
- Technical recommendations appear unclear or inconsistent
- Further information is needed before progressing

In some cases, projects may need to pause and reassess priorities before moving forward. Independent support can help review the current position and identify realistic options for progressing the project in a manageable and practical way.





13. Procurement, contractors and project delivery

As projects move closer towards delivery, there may be a need to engage with contractors, consultants or specialist suppliers.

This stage can sometimes feel challenging where there is limited experience of technical specifications, quotations or delivery processes.

Support at this stage is intended to help projects better understand technical information and feel more confident when reviewing proposals or discussing project delivery.

This may involve:

- Reviewing quotations or contractor proposals
- Explaining technical information or specifications in clearer terms
- Supporting discussions with contractors, consultants or suppliers
- Helping identify where information may be unclear or incomplete
- Exploring whether proposals appear realistic and suitable for the project
- Helping identify technical questions that may need further clarification before works progress

In some cases, support may also help projects better understand technical information during installation or commissioning stages, particularly where further clarification or technical explanation may be helpful.





14. Workshops, learning and community discussions

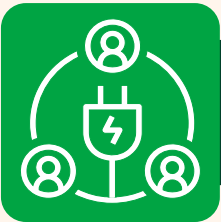
For many projects, there can be value in creating opportunities for shared learning and open discussion before major technical decisions are made.

Workshops and technical discussion sessions can help improve understanding of technologies, project processes and technical information in a more accessible and informal way.

- This type of support can help:
- Explain technical concepts and terminology more clearly
- Improve understanding of renewable or low carbon technologies
- Support discussions around possible project options
- Explore technical questions or concerns
- Build confidence when engaging with consultants, contractors or network operators
- Help identify where additional technical advice or information may be useful

Workshops may focus on technologies, grid connections, energy systems, project development processes or technical considerations linked to a proposed project.

Sessions may be delivered online, in person or as part of wider project development activities.



15. Technical assistance throughout the project journey

The level and type of support required will vary depending on the project, the building or site involved, and the experience within the project team.

Some projects may only require a small amount of early-stage guidance, while others may benefit from ongoing support throughout feasibility, procurement and delivery stages.

Technical Assistance is intended to help make projects feel more understandable, manageable and achievable by providing independent support, practical guidance and clearer pathways through what can often be a complex development process.



Common questions that may indicate support could be helpful

Projects often seek additional support when questions begin to arise around technical information, project development or decision making.

Examples of common questions may include:

- Where do we start with developing our project?
- What technologies may be suitable for our building or site?
- Do we need further surveys or technical studies?
- How do we know whether contractor proposals are reasonable?
- What information is needed before applying for funding?
- Why are different consultants recommending different approaches?
- What are the risks involved with the project?
- What should be included in a feasibility study?
- How do we compare different project options?
- What questions should we ask installers or consultants?
- Why has the project become delayed or difficult to progress?
- How do we know whether the project is ready to move forward?

These types of questions are common during project development and often form a natural part of the process. Seeking support early can help provide clearer direction and reduce uncertainty as projects develop.

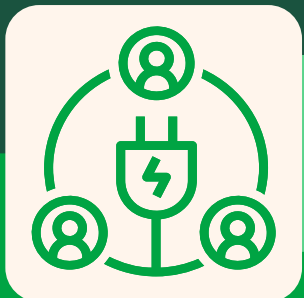




Additional Resources

- SP Energy Networks Battery Guide
spenergynetworks.co.uk/userfiles/file/Community_Support_Battery_Storage_Guide.pdf
- SP Energy Networks Solar PV Guide
spenergynetworks.co.uk/userfiles/file/Guide_to_Solar_Installation_English_V2.pdf
- SP Energy Networks Hydro Guide
spenergynetworks.co.uk/userfiles/file/Community_Support_Hydro_Guide.pdf
- SP Energy Networks Heat Pump Guide
spenergynetworks.co.uk/userfiles/file/Community_Support_Heat_Pump_Guide.pdf?v2
- SP Energy Networks Guide to Feasibility Procurement
spenergynetworks.co.uk/pages/feasibility_support.aspx
- SP Energy Networks Connection Guide
spenergynetworks.co.uk/pages/which_type_of_connection.aspx
- SP Energy Networks Community Energy Strategy 2025-2026
spenergynetworks.co.uk/pages/community_energy.aspx
- SP Energy Networks Community Energy Connection Booklet
spenergynetworks.co.uk/pages/community_page.aspx





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