

GUIDELINE: RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

Abstract

This guideline provides advice on how to recruit the consumers for the needs of your smart grid project, product or service. We specifically address several aspects of recruitment, such as target group size and characteristics, selection criteria, communication channels to be used, and incentives to be offered. The guideline is intended for project coordinators introducing new smart grid projects.

What is it?

Recruitment is the process of collecting and selecting the participants, such that a smart grid project can take place in a real life environment. The result of the recruitment campaign should not only provide a sufficient number of participants in the target group, but also the right participants. This means that they should have the requested characteristics (if any), such as location, type of house, household composition, energy consumption characteristics, etc.

Recruiting the right sample population for your project is vital for the success of your smart grid project. An insufficient number of participants or consumers with the wrong characteristics may result in the inability of the project to achieve the desired effects and results. Therefore it is highly important that the recruitment campaign is well designed and executed.



Recruitment approach from the EcoGrid project; organize local events

When to use?

The recruitment campaign takes place at the end of the planning phase, such that all participants are included in the project before it is executed. However, in some projects more participants can be recruited during the project execution phase. At the end of the recruitment phase the communication and other interactions with the

participants proceed to engagement activities, keeping the participants active in the project.

Regarding the smart grid project population size the recruitment process differs whether the project involves 1) a small limited and well controlled population of the consumers (i.e. up to 50) or 2) large scale testing fields with hundreds or thousands of consumers.

Small populations are suitable for the investigation of new functionalities and equipment, where the user response is difficult to foresee. The smaller recruitment campaign offers a more personal approach through home visits, dedicated workshops and contracting, see our guideline [Energy audits for households](#). This is especially recommended for recruitment of SMEs where the specifics of their core production should be taken into account, for more information see guideline [Introducing demand side management to SMEs](#). Do not underestimate recruitment in smaller projects; smaller recruitment campaigns can cost a lot of time and effort.

A large scale recruitment campaign is usually used at mass deployment of the tested functionalities or to reach project goals, which require large scale statistics. You use large populations when a solution is scalable and representative. Addressing a large amount of consumers requires the use of different impersonal broadcast and communication channels. The use of TV commercials, radio news and newspapers may reach a very large number of candidates (see best practice example of Alp Energy project).

Recruitment through personal relations (UppSol 2020, SE)

UppSol 2020 was a regional project aiming to increase the rate of photovoltaic (PV) installations among different target groups such as housing associations and municipalities. The project approach was based on the concept of forerunners and followers, where a group of 15-20 participants would follow the installation process of PV systems made by a user within the same target group, called forerunner. A workshop series was organised for each target group, in which the followers got general information about PVs as well as detailed information, experience and results from the forerunner's PV installation.

All recruitment to the project was based on personal contact and outreach activities, but the recruitment approach was different for forerunners and followers. First of all, the recruitment of a suitable forerunner for each target group was crucial. The presentation of the different steps of a PV installation was the centre of the project, and a well-suited forerunner – with certain characteristics - could not be found by advertisement. Instead, the project team used their wide and strong network of contacts to identify and engage such a person.

Followers were thereafter recruited through personal relations and contacts of the project team and the forerunner. In the case of municipalities, e-mail invitations were sent to relevant mailing lists and in some cases the project team had personal meetings with

municipal representatives. The project team found the meetings to be more time-consuming than e-mails but also much more rewarding since they would strengthen personal relations and help finding the right person within the municipality to participate as followers in the workshops. For housing associations, targeted invitations were distributed in certain neighbourhoods to recruit interested users.

More information on <http://www.stunsenergi.se/projekt/uppsol-2020.aspx>

What do you need to do?

The planning of the recruitment process needs to start early in the planning phase and is something that should not be neglected. The recruitment phase is usually the first phase in which communication with potential participants is established. It is therefore important to be well prepared and make a good first impression. There are a couple of aspects that need to be taken into account as part of the recruitment process.

Definition of the target group

The first question that needs to be answered is what type of participants are needed in order to come to the best project results. What is the goal of the project and what type of participants do you want to attract? The answers to these questions will be leading in the organisation and execution of the recruitment process. Are you managing a small project that includes very modern technology and are you thus looking for some young technology enthusiasts or are you managing a large scale roll out aimed at the entire population in a region? In these two cases two very different approaches are likely most (cost-)effective.

As a next step, on the basis of the answers to the questions above, it is necessary to further define the participant sample that you need. It needs to be decided what number of participants is aimed for, whether this is a fixed number or whether more or less participants would also be acceptable for the project result. Also in this step it is important to think if selection criteria are necessary or whether all interested consumers will be allowed in the project. If the first is the case the necessary selection criteria need to be defined, as well as a method of verification.

Communication methods and channels

Following this, and based on the participant group that you are looking for, it is time to decide what type of communication methods and channels you will be using for getting in contact with the potential participants. It is good practice to combine different communication channels in order to reach participants, for example to first advertise in the local newspaper, then be present at a local event and after that sending letters to the inhabitants in a small geographical area. It could also be a

good idea to use different communication methods and channels if different types of target groups need to be approached, see example below about AlpEnergy.

A large scale multi-channel recruitment campaign (AlpEnergy, DE)

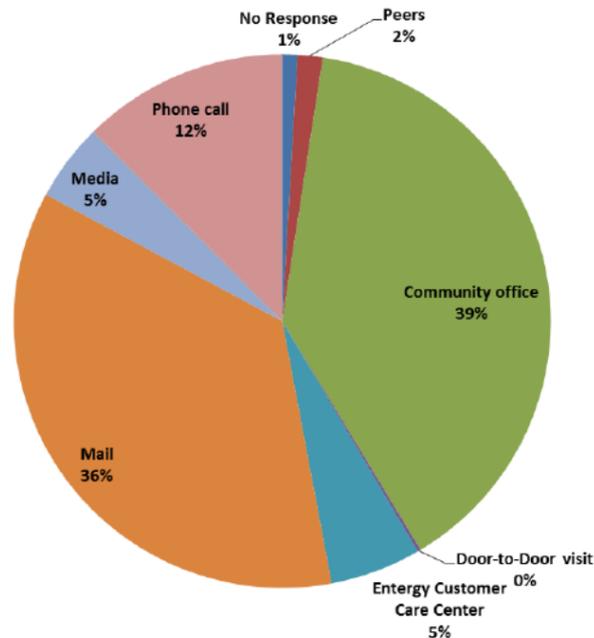
The AlpEnergy (DE) project worked with a strong focus on regional integration. In order to raise awareness for the topic in the regional and supra-regional public, a large-scale campaign was initiated, consisting of reports in the AÜW-customer-magazine 'AllgäuStromMagazin', information events, articles in regional newspapers and magazines about the field test, coverage on regional and Bavarian television, support from the mayor, the organisation of an international (scientific) conference 'AlpEnergy meets E-Energy' (May 2009), presentations at fairs, a series of lectures and coverage within the framework of the Association for Electrical, Electronic & Information Technologies in Germany.

Additionally, with the support from local organisations, B.A.U.M. Consult GmbH and AÜW wrote personal letters to the 53 companies that were identified as eligible for the study on commercial end users. The result was that 258 residential consumers and 5 commercial consumers were selected for the field test.

More information on www.alpenergy.net

To find participants from a broad population the classical broadcast methods (TV commercials, radio announcements, newspaper articles, etc.) as well as digital technologies (web news, forum discussions, non-personalized emails, etc.) are well suited. The main point of these approaches is addressing a dispersed and wide range pool of users with many different characteristics. However, although such channels usually address a very wide range of potential candidates, it is rather passive and does not always guarantee massive response when used on its own. Nevertheless, it might be a good way to introduce the project to the consumers for the first time.

In case there might be a sense of community between the potential participants, for example because they live in the same geographical area, it is recommended to include the local community. Within a local group of residents information might be shared more easily and those who have already signed up might be seen as an example for the rest. For more information on how to engage and support a local community, see our guideline [How to gather community support for your smart grid](#). Moreover, in different projects in a local setting the use of a trustworthy ambassador was found to be very convincing. More specifically in different projects the mayor of the village or town endorsed the project and was present at its events, which created more trust in the local residents, thus easing recruitment. With other ambassadors this might also work on a larger scale, such as TV celebrities or sport stars.



Eno's recruitment methods for customer participation shows the extent that local community channels succeeded in reaching prospective participants. The offices of community organizations were the most frequent way that customers learned about the programs. It also shows the variety of mechanisms and their relative contributions to the recruitment process. (2014, U.S. department of Energy)

It can be very helpful to use some more personal types of recruitment communication next to a bigger awareness campaign.

- Personal letter/e-mail may be provided by the service provider entity (supplier, grid operator, etc.), based on his customer database. The letter should contain information about further contacts (web page address, home visits, etc.). However, personalised letters and e-mails can also be used after consumers have showed interest in order to provide them with more information.
- An organised event or workshop can be used as the second step in recruitment process and is usually combined with one of the first step contacts such as broadcast or mailing. It allows interested consumers to gain more information about the project and to communicate directly with the project management. This personal contact can be used to establish a basis of trust. The number of participants at organized workshops is also an indicator of the interest of the target audience.
- Telephone calls are recommended to conduct the surveys, to invite participants to workshops and to perform follow-ups. SMS messages on the other hand can be used as reminders, e.g. for people to respond to an online

questionnaire or about upcoming events. Although effective, using this on very large participant groups can become very expensive.

- If the project foresees some home installations, in-depth surveys or more advanced services, it is recommended to provide face-to-face meetings during home visits. The residential consumers generally prefer the personal approach rather than getting the information from leaflets.
- Word of mouth is a communication method based on personal acquaintance and is suited for recruiting a really small group of participants. The service provider or project representative addresses and involves his friends, family, relatives and colleagues and asks them to do the same and make some kind of chain recruitment. This method is based on trust, it's low cost and has a high rate of response.

Making an effort by using different communication channels (EDP, PT)

InovCity is an innovative project that installed 31.000 smart meters enabling real time communication and advanced energy services to EDP Distribuição customers in the city of Evora. A wide spectrum of communication channels was used in the recruitment process. First, some desk researches were conducted to understand the attitude and behaviour of consumers towards smart grids. That action was followed by personal letters, phone calls (only for selected consumers), a website, dedicated exhibitions and educational work shop. This combination of personal and impersonal communication resulted in a high level of consumer response. After recruitment the consumers were segmented in different groups according to technical and socio-demographic characteristics and were offered certain kinds of products & services to test during the pilot.

In another Portuguese city, called Alcochete, EDP Distribuição tried to inform the residents about energy use as well as convince them to use less energy by introducing an energy game. Due to a tight relationship with the community in Alcochete the project team was able to involve the main institutions and local communities. Within the region, special events to support the launch of the game were organised to ensure a high level of participation. Dissemination materials such as flyers and posters were developed in order to engage the local students and families to participate in the contest and specific events to launch the communication for the game were promoted in Alcochete Schools, with the sponsoring of the School Community and Alcochete Municipality involvement.



Figure 1: Engaging High School students with the gaming contest

More information on http://www.cside.pt/case_portugal.asp

Including consumers as participants in your project

When potential participants have shown interest in becoming engaged with the project it is important to give them the information they need at this point to decide whether they want to go through with it, while at the same time for the project management it is important to see if the potential participant is suitable for participating. During the recruitment process interested consumers usually have to fill out questionnaires with their details. These questionnaires should be tailored to include not only general information, but also allow for seeing whether the selection criteria that have been defined (see above) are met for each participant. In order to learn more about this, see our guideline [Learning about target groups](#). Based on the information that the project management learns about the consumers it is also possible to divide the participants into smaller segments, see the guideline [Using segmentation to better target user groups](#).

What has been describe above in this subsection applies for opt-in programmes, where the default is that the potential participants are not participating, unless they are interested and willing to do so. However, there is also another option called an opt-out programme, where a group of potential participants is included in the project, unless they make objections to this. This can be useful in large roll outs and when little action is required from the consumers. However, it can be difficult to arrange this, at it is not easily allowed in most European countries.

Recruiting large groups of residential customers (CLNR, UK)

The British Gas customer base served as the main pool of potential participants for recruitment in the project CLNR. To ensure a representative number of participants for test groups of electric vehicles, heat pumps and hot water, a variety of recruitment methods were used. Beside direct marketing campaigns via phone, email, and post, also partnerships with local communities and landlords were developed. The largest group (~8,900 residential customers) was recruited via an 'opt-out' (means 'if you do not oppose, you are included') direct mail campaign to British Gas' existing smart meter customer base. Other trials generally involved an 'opt-in' (we invite you to be part of it) decision by end-users. After having received information leaf-lets by post, customers were approached by phone with the request to participate in a specific trial for which they had been selected. However this option resulted in lower response than 'opt-out' approach.

More information on <http://www.networkrevolution.co.uk>

Do's and don'ts

- **Make use of a customer relationship management system (CMRS).** Proper involvement of a CMRS relieves the administration tasks and enables monitoring of the users through several stages of the campaign.
- **Include landlords when addressing tenants.** If you are looking for tenants in your project, first inform or even include landlords in the project. There can be project set ups that need consent from landlords. That's why you need to inform, and sometimes even include them in you recruitment campaign. Also include landlords once you have them on board when addressing the tenants. This way landlords and tenants know who is informed. This saves questions towards landlords from tenants.
- **Use written letters.** In certain cases it might be better to send letters via the mail rather than sending e-mail, as some consumers consider e-mail less trustworthy. For a more formal, official impact send regular mail.
- **Draw attention of potential participants with attractive information.** To attract the interest of the residential users you may also add special communication techniques like gamification and storytelling (see guidelines [Gamification – making energy fun](#) and [Engaging people through telling stories](#)).
- **Make simple administration forms for people who want to sign up.** Keep the sign-up sheet and application forms short and simple. Filling a large amount of sensitive information may discourage from participation.
- **Use innovative marketing techniques.** One may also win interest and sympathy of residents by doing things like handing out balloons (low cost, nice for the kids), spreading information about the project by involving schools in the neighbourhood (in order to reach busy parents), or more

unconventional marketing methods, such as a promotional van in the neighbourhood.

- **Expose selection criteria at recruitment.** When you need to find specific target groups from a large pool of candidates, the addressing broadcast mechanism (i.e. announcement on the project provider web page) should contain the selection criteria as well as specific information of why such criteria is needed for the recruitment.
- **Do not recruit SME's when project characteristics affect functionalities of their primary process.** Only recruit SMEs for testing specific functionalities like ToU tariff, power restriction, direct load control and others if it does not affect their primary processes, as they are very unlikely to accept participation if this is the case. Also make sure you provide the proper guidance and help throughout the installation process and ongoing project phases.
- **Do not start recruitment too early.** Do not start recruitment activities too early, before the technical issues regarding installations and communications are developed and resolved. Otherwise the consumers will get tired of waiting for the actions and might lose interest in the project.
- **Be honest with the (potential) participants.** In the early phases of a project when potential participants are approached, these may come up with questions that cannot yet be answered. It is important to be honest about this as project management as this will lead to more trust from the participants.
- **Make sure a project website is online as soon as you start communicating to consumers.** Having a project website online that looks professional gives the potential participants the idea that the project will be professionally executed and, more importantly, it will be a way for consumers to learn more about the project to see if they are interested in becoming a participant. Next to all the information about the project and the requirements for participating we advise also to include some active (or interactive) components like interactive simulation or visualization giving the audience the understanding of the smart grid system installed, if applicable.

Further reading

- [1] S3C Consortium (2014). *Report on case analyses, success factors and best practices* (S3C D3.4). <http://www.s3c-project.eu/Deliverables.html>,
- U.S. Department of Energy (2014). *Customer participation of the Smart grid- Lessons learned*. <http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2014/10/f18/SG-CustParticipation-Sept2014.pdf>
- Liston, D. (2015). Scottish people power campaign launches today – 20,000 Scottish consumers to put Scotland first. <https://www.onebigswitch.co.uk/news/2015/05/12/press-release-scottish->

[people-power-campaign-launches-today-20-000-scottish-consumers-to-put-scotland-first](#)

This guideline was developed in the S3C project, and is freely available from www.smartgrid-engagement-toolkit.eu.

S3C paves the way for successful long-term end user engagement, by acknowledging that the "one" smart consumer does not exist and uniform solutions are not applicable when human nature is involved. Beyond acting as a passive consumer of energy, end users can take on different positions with respective responsibilities and opportunities. In order to promote cooperation between end users and the energy utility of the future, S3C addresses the end user on three roles. The *smart consumer* is mostly interested in lowering his/her energy bill, having stable or predictable energy bills over time and keeping comfort levels of energy services on an equal level. The *smart customer* takes up a more active role in future smart grid functioning, e.g. by becoming a producer of energy or a provider of energy services. The *smart citizen* values the development of smart grids as an opportunity to realise "we-centred" needs or motivations, e.g. affiliation, self-acceptance or community.

S3C performed an extensive literature review and in-depth case study research in Smart Grid trials, resulting in the identification of best practices, success factors and pitfalls for end user engagement in smart energy ventures. The analysis of collected data and experiences led to the development of a new, optimised set of tools and guidelines to be used for the successful engagement of either Smart Consumers, Smart Customers or Smart Citizens. The S3C guidelines and tools aim to provide support to utilities in the design of an engagement strategy for both household consumers and SMEs. The collection of guidelines and tools describe the various aspects that should be taken into account when engaging with consumers, customers and citizens. More information about S3C, as well as all project deliverables, can be found at www.s3c-project.eu.