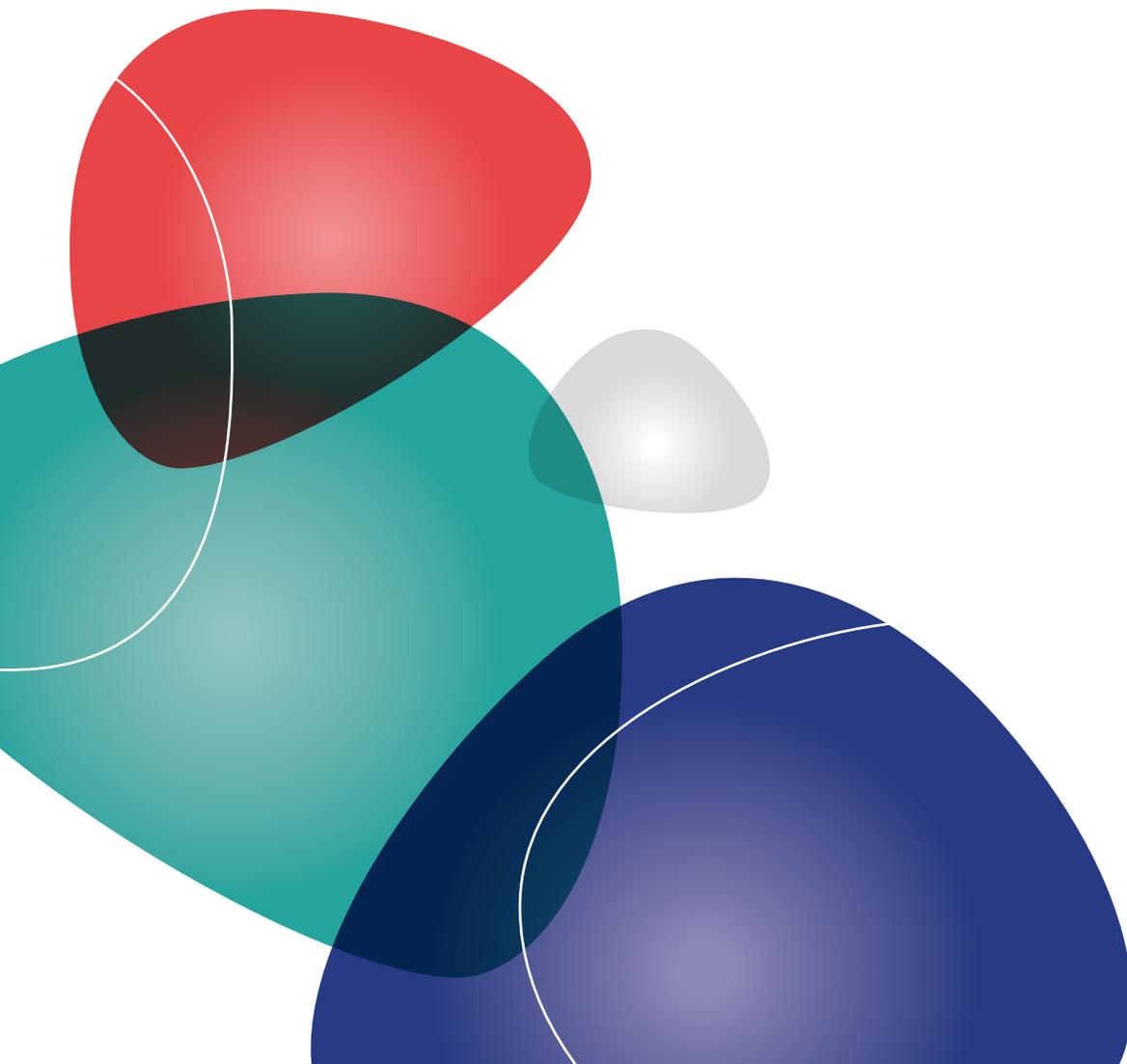




Consumer Engagement report

2020 Report

This report details summarised case studies that were submitted for the joint Energy Networks Australia & Energy Consumer Australia 2020 Consumer Engagement Award





Andrew Dillon
CEO, Energy Networks
Australia

FOREWARD

Networks across Australia have worked hard to increase and mature their consumer engagement over the past decade. Networks are increasingly recognising the importance of bespoke solutions for customers, rather than approaching their needs with a one-size-fits-all model.

The result has seen some great examples, outlined in this report, where networks have explored new ways to deepen engagement and collaboration with consumers in the face of new challenges such as COVID-19 and extreme weather events.

These awards are a way to recognise Australian energy network businesses that demonstrate outstanding leadership in consumer engagement.

Energy Networks Australia received 15 entries of extremely high standard to the 2020 Consumer Engagement Award. Nominating companies included AGIG, Ausgrid, Ausnet Services, CitiPower Powercor, Endeavour Energy, Energy Queensland, Essential Energy, Jemena, SA Power Networks and Western Power.

The independent judging panel, which comprises members from Energy Consumers Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society, Uniting Communities, Aging Queensland, the Australian Energy Market Commission, and the Australian Energy Regulator, was unanimous in its decision.

There were five shortlisted finalists:

- » Australian Gas Infrastructure Group – Customers at the Centre of our planning
- » Australian Gas Infrastructure Group – Partnering with Communities on the Future of Gas
- » AusNet Services – Customer Forum: A Trial of the ‘New Reg’ Process
- » Evoenergy – Citizens’ Jury
- » Jemena Electricity Network – COVID community response

The winner was Australian Gas Infrastructure Group for its submission “Customers at the centre of our planning”. The initiative detailed AGIG’s mission to embed a genuine customer focus across all aspects of future planning for South Australia’s gas distribution network. The campaign was based on genuine and effective engagement with a focus on empowering staff at AGIG to deliver the best outcomes for customers.

This report highlights all 15 nominations which detail the breadth of network initiatives across the country that are putting customers at the centre of their businesses.

2020 was certainly not an easy year for Australians. Bushfires, floods, drought, and a global pandemic have tested us all. Throughout these challenging events we have seen our energy networks step up and work with their communities on new projects and engagement practices that will undoubtedly become common practice in the future.

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JUDGING PANEL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Energy network businesses continue to build and grow their engagement activities with consumers, covering a more diverse range of activities and method.

During 2020, we experienced catastrophic fires across the National Electricity Market and the COVID-19 global pandemic. The impact of these two unpredicted crises has meant businesses are still re-building fire-damaged networks ahead of next summer; and households and small businesses are navigating a changed economy, way of living and working.

What is evident from these experiences is the resilience of the Australian people. We see this in the resilience of households and small businesses and the resilience of energy businesses in Australia.

This is the backdrop for the fourth year of the Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) / Energy Networks Australia (ENA) Network Consumer Engagement Award (the Award).

Stepping forward to celebrate successful engagement in the face of these challenges, we received 15 applications from ten different energy network businesses.

Through the award, we aim to recognise those businesses that are taking steps to build the values of customer perceptions, behaviour and wants into the fabric and culture of the business.

This years' Award celebrates the tenacity of energy networks and their consumers, and the shared drive to build better outcomes together.

“It turns out that trust is in fact earned in the smallest of moments. It is earned not through heroic deeds, or even highly visible actions, but through paying attention, listening, and gestures of genuine care and connection.”

Brené Brown Dare to Lead.

JUDGING COMMENTS

Strength and diversity: feedback on this year's applications

This has been an extraordinary time for all of us and undertaking consumer engagement activities while maintaining physical distancing and working from home requires a delicate balance. This year, we received applications covering issues such as:

- » innovation projects: fuel and technology
- » regulated revenue reset processes
- » COVID-19: helping consumers; and communicating about planned works during COVID-19
- » improving consumer awareness and engagement
- » disaster response and coordination
- » approach to life support customers
- » safety and remediation; and
- » vegetation management.

In this process, we recognise that each network business is at a different level of maturity when it comes to engaging with consumers and integrating consumer-based values into the organisation. We are pleased to see the improvements that networks have made across the years.

Interviews for shortlisted applications

Each year, shortlisted applicants are provided with an opportunity to speak to the Judges directly about their projects. This year, the Judges wanted to hear more about the outcomes for consumers, change to the business and transferral of knowledge across the sector. To understand how these themes were addressed through each project, the Judges asked:

- » What were the outcomes for consumers?
- » How did the engagement make a difference?
- » What are the lessons, insights, applicability to other businesses and their engagement?
- » How did the project / engagement change the business and its culture?

For applications with external sponsors, there was an additional question:

- » What value add did your business bring to the engagement, given there were external sponsors of the project?

Comments on the winning application and shortlisted applications

Winning application

Network business:

Australian Gas Infrastructure Group

Project name: Customers at the Centre of our Planning in South Australian Gas Networks

Type of project: Regulated revenue / access arrangement reset

This project had two main goals. The first aimed to embed a genuine customer focus into all aspects of its future planning of the network. The second was to develop an access arrangement proposal that delivered for future and current consumers, and that was capable of acceptance by consumers.

This project is an example of a genuine, solid engagement approach that was executed well and included genuine and extensive CEO involvement. The judges appreciated that the businesses did not need consumers to tell them that they wanted a price reduction, instead this objective was a given. The applicant was able to clearly demonstrate how consumers' feedback influenced the outcomes and proposal.

Shortlisted applications

Network business:

Australian Gas Infrastructure Group

Project name: Partnering with Communities on the Future of Gas

Type of project: Innovation projects: fuel and technology

The Australian Gas Infrastructure group won the bid to develop Hydrogen Park South Australia (HyP SA) to deliver Australia's first renewable hydrogen blended gas to existing network customers. The next step was to partner with the community and key stakeholders to co-design communications across multiple channels to address community feedback in a genuine way.

The key element of this consumer engagement project that stood out to the judges was that it was underpinned by the principle: "don't think you know more than the customers". This principle meant that the business was able to change its engagement approach in response to the community's preferences.

Network business:

AusNet Services (Distribution)

Project name: AusNet Services' Customer Forum: A Trial of the 'New Reg' Process

Type of project: Regulated revenue / access arrangement reset

Developed by the Australian Energy Regulator, ECA and ENA, the 'New Reg' vision was that energy consumers' priorities would drive regulatory outcomes. AusNet Services established an independent Customer Forum to represent the perspectives of its customers in negotiating and agreeing price and service offerings, supported by the AER. Outcomes agreed by the Customer Forum and AusNet Services were incorporated into its 2022-26 Revenue Proposal.

One of the most positive outcomes of this project was that it signalled a change for AusNet Services, with the judges noting a maturing of its approach to consumer engagement compared with previous years. The judges valued that the consumers set the agenda. They also appreciated that, based on learnings from the consumer engagement, AusNet Services changed some of its operations at little to no cost to improve the customer experience.

Network business:

Evoenergy (Gas)

Project name: Citizens' Jury

Type of project: Regulated revenue / access arrangement reset

Within its gas network 2021-26 (GN21) regulatory review consumer engagement program, Evoenergy sought to understand consumer needs and expectations amid an uncertain future for the distribution of natural gas. Against the backdrop of the ACT Government's globally ambitious 2045 zero net greenhouse gas emission target, Evoenergy took a deliberative approach to engagement through a 'Citizens' Jury'.

Similar to AusNet Services, the judges noted the 'Citizens' Jury' approach represented a significant improvement in consumer engagement for Evoenergy. This project highlights the growth in the Evoenergy culture, as senior management and the CEO participated in the engagement program. The judges commend Evoenergy for tackling a difficult problem in a creative way.

Network business:

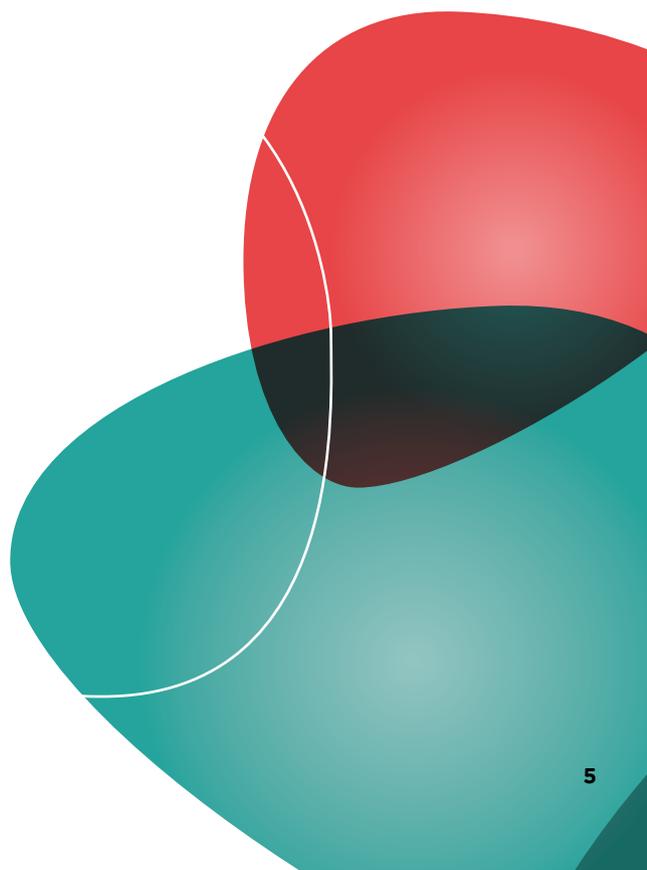
Jemena Electricity Network

Project name: COVID-19 Community Response: Supporting our Community

Type of project: Regulated revenue / access arrangement reset

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Jemena Electricity Network recognised the need to maintain an essential service while at the same time support people within the culturally diverse communities connected to its network. COVID-19 redefined vulnerability for energy consumers and against rapidly evolving external circumstances and timeframes, Jemena Electricity Network identified key customer and community challenges using a consultative, evidence-based approach. Understanding these challenges, Jemena Electricity Network led a dynamic program of solutions delivered in collaboration with industry and community.

As the joint winner of the 2019 Award, the Jemena Electricity Network application highlights that there are always new ways to embed consumer values into the business. Jemena Electricity Network was able to demonstrate further culture change within the organisation and shared the key learning that there are opportunities for doing better that do not require a trigger (such as COVID-19).



JUDGING PANEL



Lynne Gallagher
Chief Executive Officer, Energy Consumers Australia (Chair)

Lynne Gallagher is the Chief Executive Officer of Energy Consumers Australia, which is the national advocacy organisation contributing to shaping Australia's energy future for households and small businesses. Lynne has been with Energy Consumers Australia for over 5 years and has over 20 years experience in the energy sector in strategy, policy and research roles. Prior to working in the energy sector, Lynne held senior executive roles in business and in the public sector, where she delivered major reforms that contributed to improving the financial and economic wellbeing of many Australians.



Gavin Dufty
Senior Executive, Policy and Research Manager, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria

Gavin is Senior Executive of Policy and Research Manager at the St Vincent de Paul Society. Gavin has been as a consumer representative in the energy sector for over 25 years.

During this time, he has undertaken research about electricity disconnections; documented changes in energy pricing and its impacts on households; and been involved in the development of state and federal energy consumer protection and concession frameworks.

Gavin is currently a representative on several industry and government committees including gas and electricity distribution companies' customer consultative committees; AGL's national customer council; the AER's customer consultative group and is a board member of Energy Consumers Australia.



Mark Henley
Manager Advocacy and Energy Advocate, Uniting Communities

Mark Henley is an economist, who in addition to his part-time employment at Uniting Communities is a member of the Australian Energy Regulator's Consumer Challenge Panel. He is an inaugural member of the national small energy consumers Roundtable and sits on a number of utility focused consumer reference groups.

Mark has worked in community services for over 40 years, is a Life Member of SACOSS and the Youth Affairs Council of SA, for whom he was the inaugural President.

Issues of interest for Mark include poverty and addressing disadvantage which has meant that he has been actively working on energy affordability issues over recent years as well as taxation, gambling, housing and labour markets.



Robyn Robinson
Director, Council on the Ageing
Queensland

Robyn held executive and senior management positions within the electricity industry in Queensland for over 20 years. She has an extensive background in IT management, business performance improvement and managing organisational change. Robyn combines her knowledge and experience in the Australian energy industry and advocates for the rights and needs of senior energy consumers. In 2013, Robyn was appointed as an inaugural member of the Australian Energy Regulator’s Consumer Challenge Panel and was re-appointed to the panel for a second term in 2016. Robyn is currently a member of the Board of two not-for-profit organisations concerned with the well-being of seniors in the community.

Robyn has qualifications in science and IT and holds a Master of Science Degree in Operations Research. She is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Merryn York
Commissioner, Australian Energy
Market Commission

Merryn is one of the five AEMC Commissioners who are responsible for overseeing development of the rules for the national electricity and gas markets and advising governments on energy market development policy.

Prior to joining the AEMC, Merryn worked in the Queensland electricity industry, including eight years as Chief Executive of Powerlink Queensland.

An electrical engineer by profession, Merryn has long held an interest in the inter-relation and evolution of the broader energy ‘ecosystem’; how collaboration with industry and consumers plays a crucial role in its development; and incorporating technology developments as part of the transition to a lower carbon future.

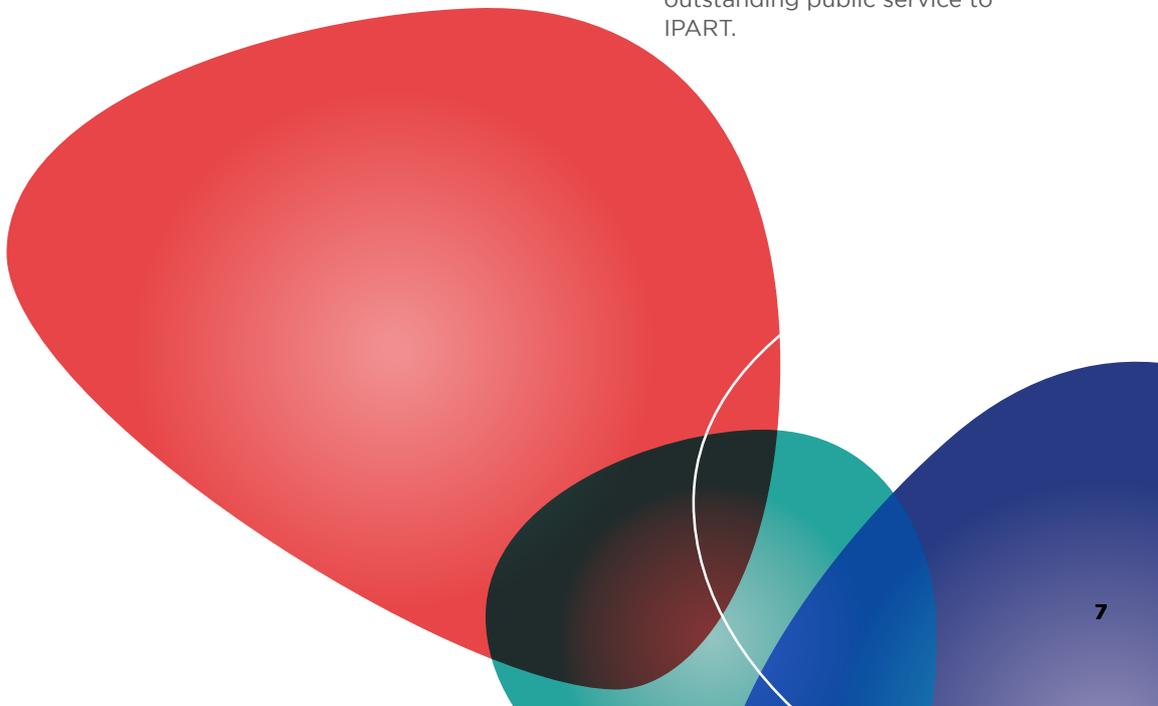


Jim Cox
Deputy Chair, Australian Energy
Regulator
Jim (James) Cox, Deputy Chair,
AER

Prior to joining the AER Board in 2013, Jim has held positions with the RBA, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat. Between 1989 and 1992 Jim was a consultant to the NSW Cabinet Office. Then he was Principal Adviser to the Government Pricing Tribunal from 1992 and a Member of the Tribunal from January 1996. He was Acting Chairman of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) during 2004 and 2009-11.

Jim assisted the NZ Government with social policy changes and has written extensively on economic and social policy issues.

He was awarded the Public Service Medal in the Australia Day honours list in 2011 for outstanding public service to IPART.



AGIG - Customers at the centre of our planning in South Australia - Australian Gas Networks

**2021
Winner**
Consumer
Engagement
Award



Principal company

Australian Gas Infrastructure Group

Name of project

Customers at the centre of our planning in South Australia - Australian Gas Networks

Project partners

The engagement program was designed and delivered in partnership with KPMG and the Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia (MCCSA).

Project timeline

February 2019 to July 2020 (ongoing)

Location

South Australia

Description

AGIG set out to embed a genuine customer focus into all aspects of its future planning for the South Australian Gas Distribution Network (AGN). The program was based on genuine and effective engagement, with a focus on empowering staff to deliver the best outcomes for customers.

AGN set a clear objective of developing a plan which delivers for current and future customers, is underpinned by effective stakeholder engagement and is capable of being accepted by customers and stakeholders.

Benefit to consumers

The project sought to ensure genuine and effective engagement which included 22 iterative customer workshops where customers could have open discussions with AGN about what was important to them. AGN discussed the key issues of most importance, and then tested and validated proposals with their customers. AGN tracked and documented all engagement activities, so any customer or stakeholder could easily see how feedback has informed plans.

Approach

AGN set out to integrate customer engagement as core business, aligned to its values and business processes. Based on feedback from the draft engagement program, AGN designed a program during 2019/ 2020 which included a series of iterative customer workshops and more opportunities for customers to be involved including CALD communities. AGN also included a new online engagement platform (Gas Matters) to support face to face engagement activities. More than 90 per cent of customers and stakeholders told us our program was inclusive, transparent, well run and of a high standard. 98 per cent of customers felt they had the opportunity to have their say.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

This project has been AGN's most extensive and in-depth engagement program to date. Customer feedback was used to develop and shape plans on key issues including price, future of gas, and education. AGN also engaged with its Stakeholder Reference Groups as a key way to receive input from stakeholders on plans as they were developed.

Leadership and transferability

Delivering for customers is the lead driver of the AGIG vision. Overarching corporate values drive culture, behaviour and decision making. The value of 'One Team' is an example of AGIG's approach bringing customers into the decision making process to develop future plans. AGIG recognises values of "do the right thing by customers" and "be accountable to our customers". Key learnings for future engagement activities, and the broader energy sector include leadership, ownership and involvement by the executive team showed customers their views are being heard and acted on by senior decision makers. High quality engagement doesn't need to be "bells and whistles", but what's important is that the engagement activity is genuine, and that customer feedback is captured and responded to. Customers and stakeholders value being part of all stages of the process, including being part of the early discussions which informs decisions, rather than be consulted after decisions or positions have been formed.

AGIG – Partnering with communities on the future of gas



Principal company

Australian Gas Infrastructure Group

Name of project

Partnering with communities on the future of gas – Engaging on Australia’s first renewable gas blending project

Project partners

communicate et al.

Promanage

Project timeline

2019 – 2020 (ongoing)

Location

Mitchell Park, South Australia

Funding

Funding awarded by the South Australian South Government

Description

AGIG customers advised the network that they expected gas infrastructure to play a role in the decarbonised future. AGIG felt it important to pursue projects such as HyP SA to deliver lowest cost decarbonisation whilst retaining safe and reliable energy supply. Once online in late Spring-2020, HyP SA will be the first time renewable hydrogen is blended with natural gas for supply to customers. AGIG recognise community trust is key to the future success of HyP SA and the industry more generally.

Benefit to consumers

HyP SA will deliver Australia’s first renewable hydrogen blended gas (up to 5 per cent) to existing network customers. Customers do not need to do anything to receive the blended gas and they will not pay any more than they do for 100 per cent natural gas. Whilst HyP SA responds to customers’ desire for low-carbon energy, it is essential customers remain confident it will continue delivering energy safely, reliably and at lowest cost. Historically, knowledge on renewable gases was low. AGIG partnered with the Mitchell Park community and key stakeholders to co-design communications spanning multiple channels to address community feedback in a genuine way.

Approach

HyP SA is an Australian-first project, and it was important to be innovative and take learnings from related work within Australia and internationally. The strategy was informed by AGN’s broader engagement techniques and the approach was co-designed with the community and stakeholders through focus groups, and workshops with stakeholders such as gas retailers, government, and council. Stakeholders and the community were given access to information when and how they want it; this meant focusing on the community at large rather than just gas customers, so neighbours can access the same information regardless of a gas connection. AGIG appointed a dedicated project officer to answer phone and email queries and the community was offered a range of different collateral as required. Benefits, results, and outcomes

Benefits, results, and outcomes

Through HyP SA, Mitchell Park customers will receive Australia’s lowest carbon gas through the existing network. They will not pay any more than if they were receiving 100 per cent natural gas. Engagement was tailored to community needs, not just based on industry standard. As a result, the community and stakeholders have access to information and staff members when and how they want it. They have a better understanding of the energy transition and how the industry is working to deliver for them now and in the future.

Leadership and transferability

Community and stakeholder engagement is embedded in AGIG’s company vision, throughout daily operations and long-term strategy. This commitment is driven from the top, with executive management directly involved in the development and delivery of engagement programs. From HyP SA, AGIG understands the benefits of mapping out past experiences, needs, wants and concerns to assess key risks, informing the engagement approach; and then validating the strategy through focus groups and further stakeholder engagement. The community was open and accepting of change, understanding the need to pursue a cleaner future and trusting us to deliver energy safely. Key to engagement success was providing flexibility in the communication approach, and having a dedicated team responding to queries, delivering consistent and timely feedback. Through HyP SA AGIG have established a new standard for engaging on the renewable gas energy transformation.

Ausgrid - Customer-driven network innovation



Principal company

Ausgrid

Name of project

Customer-driven network innovation, with a focus on community batteries.

Project partners

Network Innovation Advisory Committee (NIAC) Members, KPMG, Newgate Research, Relevant local government authorities.

Project timeline

July 2019 - ongoing

Location

New South Wales

Description

Ausgrid has established a new engagement approach that places customers at the centre of investment decisions. The Network Innovation Advisory Committee (NIAC) is shaping the delivery of the Network Innovation Program. Community batteries can offer a more cost-effective alternative to customers than installing their own battery storage. Through the NIAC, Ausgrid are ensuring innovation programs will support greater customer choice and control over their energy usage.

Benefit to consumers

The NIAC aims to act on customer feedback and build a deeper understand of customer needs and use this understanding to create products and services that customers value most.

NIAC is also deigned to ensure Ausgrid is accountable for incorporating customer perspectives into investment decisions and trigger cultural change internally and role model our engagement model across Ausgrid.

Customers will benefit from the NIAC because every dollar spent in innovation investment must be shown to deliver tangible benefits for customers. This will foster a greater emphasis on customer needs in all Ausgrid decisions.

Approach

Ausgrid recognised a need to build customers' trust and improve our decision making. The establishment of the NIAC is a key initiative, agreed to by customers, designed to drive Ausgrid's openness and transparency and collaboratively evolve the grid. The committee comprises a range of customer, peak body and academic representatives. Today, 11 projects are progressing with the NIAC's oversight with the Community Battery and Network Insights Programs considered the top-rated initiatives.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

The NIAC will make a difference to customers by ensuring investment is directed where it is most valuable, allowing for reprioritisation as technology evolves. A good example of this is Ausgrid's Community Battery Program.

Leadership and transferability

The establishment of the NIAC was endorsed by the Ausgrid Board and the leadership team and this engagement model is now being used across the business for other projects. Knowledge sharing is built into the principles of the NIAC, which will help to reduce research duplication across the sector. Program learnings are shared through Energy Networks Australia's Future Network Forum.

There is also evidence that other networks are looking to the NIAC as an engagement model for their projects. Much of the work delivered by the NIAC on community batteries as has generated thought leadership on the role of community batteries, potential models and regulatory approaches.

Ausgrid: Critical works during COVID lockdown - “Give us a wave” campaign



Principal company

Ausgrid

Name of project

Ausgrid's critical work during COVID lockdown - “Give us a wave”.

Project timeline

May 2020 - June 2020

Location

Delivered digitally across channels to the Ausgrid network.

Description

When COVID19 arrived, Ausgrid had just had the worst storm season in more than a decade. Critical maintenance work was needed across the network to ensure the grid's resilience. Ausgrid identified a need to better inform customers about why the critical work was so vital during the pandemic. The team developed a consumer campaign that featured a diverse range of frontline staff. The campaign involved a film and a series of photos published across Ausgrid's digital channels to increase awareness of the importance of critical work during COVID lockdown.

Benefit to consumers

Following a rapid spike in complaints and concerns from customers, stakeholders and media regarding planned outages still occurring while people and families were working from home, Ausgrid changed the way in which it prioritised critical maintenance and associated outages during the COVID19 lockdown. The ability to prioritise the business' focus on critical work, helped customers maintain confidence and trust in Ausgrid and highlighting why the work was critical.

Approach

When NSW went into lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Ausgrid was faced with the challenge on maintaining reliable supply, continuing recovery and maintenance following the February storms and rebuilding trust with customers.

The 'Give Us a Wave' campaign had three key objectives:

- » Educate the public about the work Ausgrid crews do to help keep the lights on, and why critical work needed to continue despite COVID-19.
- » Humanise Ausgrid's staff to encourage empathy and respect from the public, change behaviour and keep staff safe and supported in the workplace.
- » Develop a unified, “we're all in this together” mindset with our customers.

Ausgrid launched the campaign in the mainstream media including in the Sydney Morning Herald which ran alongside the launch of the 'Give Us a Wave' film on Ausgrid social media channels.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

The 'Give Us a Wave' campaign was the most successful piece of customer engagement in Ausgrid's history. The five-week campaign received an enormous 2,728,600 impressions on social media and secured overwhelmingly positive support from Ausgrid customers. The campaign received widespread support from the industry, politicians and business leaders and was shared widely throughout social media. Most importantly though, there was a noticeable change in customer complaints about planned critical outages. The campaign helped to positively promote the need for critical work and highlighted that customers are accepting and understanding of the role Ausgrid crews have to play in helping communities survive the global pandemic.

Leadership and transferability

Despite the challenges COVID-19 brought with it, positive experiences were borne from it too. The “Give Us a Wave” campaign opened a fresh style of engagement with Ausgrid's customers and stakeholders. This demonstrated that customers prefer and respond best to authentic content that features its frontline workers. Due to the strong positive outcomes of this campaign, Ausgrid learnt customers like learning about how the network works and the various complex jobs that Ausgrid crews do. Many opportunities for education about the industry still exist and the Ausgrid team is already working to build on the 'Give Us a Wave' campaign for future consumer engagement activities to help build trust and confidence and better deliver the services its customers want.

AusNet Services' Customer Forum: A Trial of the 'New Reg' Process



Principal company

Ausnet Services

Name of project

AusNet Services' Customer Forum: A Trial of the 'New Reg' Process

Project partners

Australia Energy Regulator

Project timeline

December 2018 to January 2020

Location

AusNet Services' distribution network in eastern Victoria, spanning from the edge of Melbourne to the border of New South Wales.

Description

In 2018 AusNet Services had an opportunity to undertake a trial of the NewReg process, developed by the AER, ECA and ENA. The NewReg vision is that energy consumers' priorities will drive regulatory outcomes. AusNet established an independent Customer Forum to represent the perspectives of our customers in negotiating and agreeing price and service offerings, supported by the AER. The Customer Forum met with many AusNet staff over the two years, to gain detailed information on the business, customers, and plans.

Benefit to consumers

AusNet Services viewed the opportunity to undertake a trial of the NewReg process as a catalyst to become a more customer-centric organisation. AusNet had the following specific objectives for undertaking the project:

- » To drive cultural change;
- » To develop a revenue proposal that reflected what our customers wanted;
- » Engage in an open and transparent process to develop the proposal; and
- » A successful negotiation of key parts of the proposal.

Customers have benefitted as a result of this initiative by AusNet Services becoming easier to deal with, being cheaper, getting more involved with the community; and having strong incentives to deliver ongoing improvements for customers.

Approach

The Customer Forum was established as an independent body, and the roles of the AER, Customer Forum and AusNet in the NewReg process were outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding. Using the Forum as the primary means of engagement for regulatory determinations was an Australian first. Over two years the forum undertook 28 days of road trips to hear from many customers, particularly in rural areas, and brought perspectives back into the business. They strongly influenced AusNet's customer research program. This process elevated the status of customer improvements in the business compared to previous processes, due to the public profile of the trial and clear link with the regulatory process.

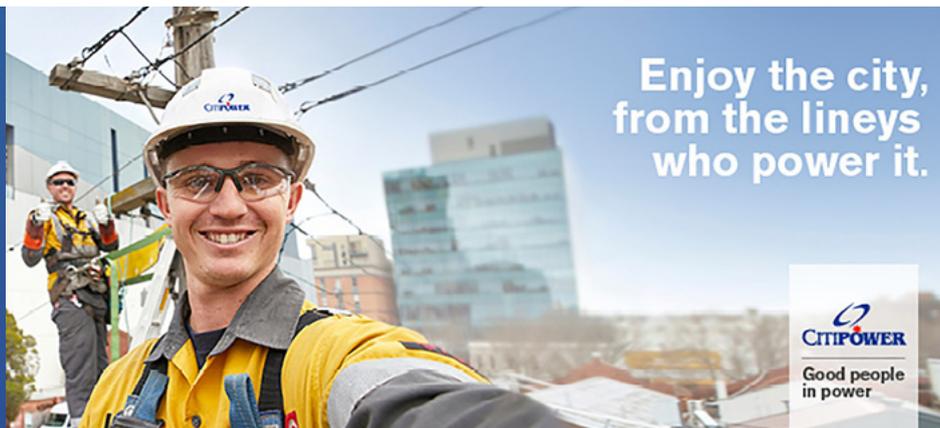
Benefits, results, and outcomes

Overall customer satisfaction rose by 10 per cent with enhanced customer experience across key interactions including DER connections, improved customers' experience, employed new customer relationship managers for business customers and have improved the outages management and communications. Ausnet Services' revenue proposal contains headline revenue reductions of \$110 per customer with 2,300 business customers on the cheapest network tariff for their usage. AusNet Services has also instituted an outreach program to assist customers in energy hardship and customer satisfaction outcomes are embedded in employee bonus outcomes. By engaging skilled individuals without energy backgrounds AusNet Services saw valuable and deep insights into an organisation impacting its operations and culture.

Leadership and transferability

The transparent monitoring and evaluation that is being carried out by the AER, ECA and ENA, will enable learnings to be shared across industry on the NewReg process, and the value that deep immersive engagement between a group of individuals representing customers' perspectives and a business can bring. AusNet's key learning was that a myriad of small, inexpensive actions across the organisation can be taken to improve customer experience.

CitiPower PowerCor United Energy: The 'Good People in Power' revolution



Principal company

CitiPower PowerCor
United Energy

Name of project

The 'Good People in Power'
revolution

Project timeline

1 June 2019 to 31 July 2020

Location

Victoria

Description

Extensive consultation conducted for the CitiPower PowerCor United Energy (CPPCUE) regulatory reset process found less than 50 per cent of customers knew who their distribution network was, what they did and the value for money their services represented. As a result, overall perceptions of the energy supply chain and costs led to low consumer trust in distribution networks. CPPCUE therefore developed 'Good People in Power'. More than just an advertising campaign, this was an integrated communications and stakeholder engagement program that sought to create a point of difference for the businesses, proactively inform and educate and in so doing, build trust.

Benefit to consumers

Customer benefits have resulted from the objectives to inspire greater empathy internally for the needs and expectations of customers, improve customer experience, improve customer awareness on the importance of network reliability, strengthen direct relationships and their outcomes with customers and educate customers about the role distribution businesses play in the energy supply chain. The main outcome CPPCUE set out to achieve was to build customers trust and deliver benefits that meet their expectations and needs.

Approach

The program is designed and segmented to target the interests and needs of different audiences. CPPCUE focused on advertising, stakeholder engagement, consumer marketing, partnerships and internal communication and targeted stakeholders across the sector from customers to employees. The primary focus was to raise the profile of CPPCUE and the role of networks, communicate the work being achieved and promote the products and services being delivered. CPPCUE used real life workers in their collateral to demonstrate authenticity in advertising and used social media and geotargeting to speak directly to impacted about new projects or major works. These programs were new to the business in the 2020 financial year with the exception of partnership and values awards campaigns, which have been strengthened. Proactively engaging customers through the new programs is recognised as one of the most critical improvements.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

Advertising reached millions of people in all three network areas, while digital platforms have been effective in providing information to segmented, local and mass audiences. This is important in answering specific needs for customers. Digital audience targeting has also supported objectives to include Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities. Baselines for the effectiveness of this program were established by engagement conducted for our regulatory reset process. Results for consumer marketing programs were also compared year-on-year to assess the benefit of improved market segmentation.

Leadership and transferability

The key learning from this holistic initiative is that with greater knowledge comes greater trust. The Brand Health Tracker found customers who can correctly name five or more of the roles delivered by networks have higher absolute trust at 25% compared to the network average of 20%. While knowledge of CPPCUE's role in supply reliability, outages and maintenance are primary drivers, our work in electricity connections, demand management and smart meter services are also now better understood. A key learning from this program has been the need to better share customer data and information to support internal decision-making.

Endeavour Energy: Endeavour Energy's Bushfire Response 2019- 2020



Principal company

Endeavour Energy

Name of project

Endeavour Energy's Bushfire Response 2019/20

Project partners

State and local energy management centres, the SES, RFS, Police, the ADF, The Energy Charter, retailers, other distributors and utility companies, contractors, the media, local MPs, state and federal ministers, relevant government departments and agencies, the AER, AEMC, ENA, and charities.

Project timeline

October 2019 - ongoing

Location

Devastating bushfires burned across 45 per cent of Endeavour Energy's distribution area, including the Gospers Mountain fire in the Blue Mountains, Green Wattle Creek in the Southern Highlands and Currowan in the South Coast for a sustained number of months.

Description

The 2019-20 bushfires had an enormous impact on Endeavour Energy's customers and communities. Endeavour sought to create a comprehensive engagement program aimed to restore power to customers safely and quickly, support customers and workers during and after the fires; and deliver key learnings to mitigate risk and impact of future bushfires to lives and livelihoods.

Benefit to consumers

Endeavour Energy's core customer promise is to keep the lights on. The fires affected the physical, psychological and economic well-being of customers. Their safety depended on the quality of Endeavour's response in restoring power to water, food, fuel, banking and mobile services. Customers required reassurance and an urgent response. Key to this was open channels of communication to all stakeholders to understand their needs and keep them informed. Of 54,000 customers without power, 50 per cent had supply restored within 12 hours of outage, and 80 per cent within 48 hours. The longest restoration was ten days. Endeavour Energy staff entered shocked communities and were humbled by the warmth by which they were received.

"I'll never forget the waves and smiles from the Nowra community as a convoy of 80 trucks rolled through the town one evening after a hard day's work."

Scott Ryan GM Operations - Lindsay can we highlight this in some way.

Approach

Endeavour Energy responded decisively, credibly and empathetically and was fully accessible to customers and stakeholders. Support came from all areas of the business with staff willingly cancelled leave and worked long hours for the community. Endeavour Energy collaborated and cooperated with state and local emergency management centres, the SES, RFS, local police, the ADF, energy retailers, fellow distributors and utility companies, the media, councils, local MPs, state and federal ministers, government departments and agencies, the AER, AEMC, ENA, and charities. This included creating The National Bushfire Networks Coordination Group to allow electricity distributors across the country to share information, essential equipment, materials and human resources, and a staff volunteering scheme to assist local communities.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

Endeavour Energy achieved its target of restoring supply safely and quickly. Hundreds of kilometres of network was rebuilt including about 800 damaged or destroyed power poles. Endeavour also deployed 95 temporary generators to 900 customers until network supply was returned, a new initiative that has been shared across the industry. Throughout the incident, innovations and learnings were made and benefits and outcomes measured which will form the incident response to future bushfires. This included digitally importing RFS fire maps into mapping systems to know what areas were safe, using thermovision cameras to identify smouldering trees that had the potential to fail and installing our first standalone power system (SAPS) for a bushfire customer.

Leadership and transferability

The response was led from the top including the Endeavour Energy interim CEO and executive team visiting bushfire affected communities, field depots, control rooms and then connecting customer issues directly back into operations to expedite practical solutions. The intense focus on customer and stakeholder engagement seen in the response is aligned to Endeavour Energy's corporate purpose - *To power communities for a better future.*

Endeavour Energy's experiences of the bushfires has seen a renewed commitment to collaboration due to its positive outcomes.

Energy Queensland: Collaborating differently to make Disaster Response thrive



Principal company

Energy Queensland

Name of project

Collaborating differently to make Disaster Response thrive

Project partners

Ergon Energy Network and Energex, as part of Energy Queensland, the Thriving Communities Partnership, Symplicit and other TCP Partners: Suncorp, Australian Red Cross, QCOSS, Good Shepherd Microfinance (now Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand), NAB, the Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland and state government representatives.

Project timeline

Mid 2019 - July 2020

Location

The stakeholder engagement has been Queensland wide, with the interviews undertaken in Townsville listening to community members impacted by the 2019 North Queensland Monsoon disaster.

Description

The industry-leading collaborative engagement project involved mapping Townsville individual and small business community's experiences following the 2019 North Queensland major flooding event. By asking people directly and listening to their perspectives, then mapping their journey, it looked to understand the interactions people had with different organisations during and following severe weather events. The project identified opportunities to provide tangible, actionable, scalable, cross-industry and cross-sector improvements to support communities and individuals impacted by disaster.

Benefit to consumers

The Thriving Communities Partnership (TCP) engagement collaboration provided a unique opportunity to improve Energy Queensland's ability to support Queenslanders in times of need. Energy Queensland's power restoration recovery plans often lead the way in Queensland's disaster response efforts. While well-versed in emergency response, and despite having strong relationships with councils/emergency service providers, EQ felt there was more they could do more using a deeper understanding of the holistic disaster experience, and by partnering more broadly with others.

Approach

Energy Queensland pitched the disaster engagement idea to the TCP, with the project soon embraced by Suncorp and others. They collaborated and built the scope throughout 2019-20 and engaged local, state, and national organisations. This culminated in Symplicit joining TCP and conducting the research. While individuals interviewed all lived through the same event, each had unique experiences and insights to share. Interpreters were accessed to support linguistically diverse participants. The human-centered design approach helped to bridge the gap between people and their experience with service providers during and after the monsoon. The project successfully mapped these complex, large-scale, cross-organisational experiences.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

Opportunities to improve community outcomes and address the pain points identified along the 'disaster journey' were recognised throughout this project. The project has already made a difference to Energy Queensland's communications approach, and its efforts to improve access to clear, aligned and trusted natural disaster information and resources. As an essential service provider, EQ will continue to look for ways to achieve a stronger 'community presence' and improve the provision of messaging through community recovery hubs to facilitate greater access to available support. The report itself is proving a powerful tool to engage internally and externally, with local disaster management groups and others. Another future collaboration opportunity may be in improving access to training around trauma-informed practices for frontline workers and first responders.

Leadership and transferability

The key learning has been the interconnectivity of the ecosystem and the need for internal divisions and external organisations to work more collectively. This has expanded thinking around EQ's responsibility, as a network business, to those at greater risk of experiencing vulnerability (including those older or with a disability), beyond the more 'normal' retail bill focus. By working with TCP, we are committed to ensuring this research is used to create meaningful change and has been provided to the broader TCP community (over 270 organisations nationally), with plans to use it to engage with providers on the ground in Townsville (Phase 2) to explore opportunities for more effective responses in future disaster events. It has also demonstrated how research can be conducted ethically and respectfully with those experiencing vulnerability.

Energy Queensland: Look up and live – powerline safety at your fingertips



Lines are all around us, yet powerlines are the lines that matter most. Plan ahead and check powerline locations to avoid contact.



Principal company

Energy Queensland

Name of project

Look up and live – powerline safety at your fingertips

Project partners

Developed within Energy Queensland by Principal Community Safety Specialist Glen Cook and the Community Safety Team.

Project timeline

Mapping tool launched in April 2019 and ongoing community education

Location

Various locations across Queensland

Description

Ergon Energy Network and Energex deliver electricity Queensland-wide with 1.7 million power poles and over 200,000 kilometres of powerlines. Unfortunately, powerlines are accidentally contacted by ‘workers’ daily, especially in the agriculture and construction sectors, resulting in severe, sometimes fatal injuries. To improve safety around overhead powerlines Energy Queensland developed a new, lifesaving engagement tool. The lookupandlive.com.au online tool helps those working near powerlines to map out the risk before starting the job.

Benefit to consumers

Heightened awareness raised by the app has already delivered significant benefits in improved community safety outcomes around powerlines. There’s been a significant drop in powerline incidents since 2019. The tool was developed to address two key risks lack of planning by those working near powerlines and inattentive blindness (a psychological phenomenon resulting from a lack of attention to danger in plain sight – our powerlines). Energy Queensland identified the industries at greatest risk – construction, aviation, agriculture, emergency services and transport. Since launching, the focus has been on promoting its role in works planning with these ‘at-risk’ industries.

Approach

The development of the tool was informed by engaging widely with at-risk industries and other stakeholders to find out what was needed to address ongoing safety issues and data informed understanding of how powerline incidents occur. The app allows users to geospatially overlay powerline information onto online imagery and can look at the worksite from a new vantage point and identify the electrical hazards, assess powerline risks, implement appropriate control measures and access links with additional safety advice. Users can draw or write on the map then print the plan for their property or construction site, screen share or apply different safety processes from within the app. The engagement approach to promote the tool built on a long history of engaging with key stakeholders and target audiences, led by Glen ‘Cookie’ Cook, whose passion for community safety has been recognised widely.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

Prior to 2019, Energy Queensland were aware of up to 40 safety incidents each sugar cane season. Since raising awareness of the online tool with stakeholders across the agricultural industry and directly with those working near powerlines there has been a dramatic reduction in incidents. Previously, three at-risk sectors – heavy vehicles, machinery, aircraft – recorded around 500 incidents a year but since the engagement campaign promoting the tool this number has reduced by around a third. The tool has been embraced by equipment operators, farmers, truck drivers, and pilots alike as an authoritative source of indispensable safety information and has over 25,000 views. The tool’s success has also been internal with field crews and contractors able to use the maps for works planning and as part of site induction packages. It’s also part of a new TAFE course. EQ are confident this App will continue to help save lives, reduce both property damage and network service interruptions.

Leadership and transferability

This initiative is an Australian first. lookupandlive.com.au has been adopted by first responders, and emergency services dispatchers can now use the app to inform crews/incident controllers if there is a powerline hazard onsite before they arrive, instantly sharing the map to show valuable information. LifeFlight now has their aircraft iPads loaded with the app to forward plan rescue landings and extractions. On site, controllers and response crews can access the information on tablets or phones. If used at construction quoting stage, overhead powerline hazards could be eliminated by costing in plans to take an overhead powerline underground, or for de-energising while the work is performed.

Essential Energy: Response to the 2019-2020 summer of bushfires



Principal company

Essential Energy

Name of project

Essential Energy's response to the 2019-2020 summer of bushfires.

Project timeline

October 2019 - current

Location

Regional NSW

Description

The 2019-20 'black summer' of bushfires placed huge and evolving demands across Essential Energy, necessitating innovative and comprehensive consumer engagement. With the electricity distribution network sustaining more damage than ever before, the community impact was intense and immediate for their customers. Essential Energy embraced both hi-tech channels and old-fashioned grunt work to underpin their engagement and encouraged genuine two-way dialogue.

Benefit to consumers

Effective community engagement was at the heart of Essential Energy's bushfire response. The number one benchmark for consumer benefits is that there were no major safety incidents for employees, customers and the community. Despite the obvious hazards, Essential Energy's safety-first approach paid dividends, with no injuries during the largest energy network infrastructure restoration program in Australian history. For the 104,000-plus customers affected by power outages, it was important to not only set expectations on how and when electricity connections would be restored but continually provide updates to reflect the evolving situation

Approach

The widespread community impact of the bushfires required a whole-of-community approach to engagement, involving proactive and reactive communications, and engagement tailored to specific regions, towns and in some cases, individual customers. Comprehensive understanding of local communities and empathy for customers was at the heart of Essential's approach. Underlining this commitment, many employees cut short holidays to return to the frontline while some colleagues who lost their home in the fires opted to come back to work to get the job done. It was vital Essential Energy has access to the latest information from multiple fire-fronts across the state to provide a tailored emergency response and keep the community informed.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

Essential Energy worked with customers to understand each individual's needs. Essential Energy has over 5000 life support customers affected by power outages and customers needed concise, timely and accurate information. Adding to the challenge, many communities lost power and telecommunications at times during the crisis, making many of the modern customer engagement channels redundant. Essential Energy held community meetings to provide up-to-date information about outages and safety. Advice needed to be printed out in hardcopy to ensure those without telecommunications or the those unable to use social media or emails could access the information. When the telephone contact methods couldn't track down customers because of failed communications Essential Energy employees drove out to homes and businesses to speak directly with the customer. This is clearly above and beyond normal practices but illustrates the personal commitment to comprehensive consumer engagement. Direct feedback from customers demonstrated the community engagement helped customers better understand the challenges Essential Energy faced and created an open dialogue.

Leadership and transferability

Essential Energy teams worked with all levels of government and emergency services to inform, advise and understand the issues at hand. With senior liaison officers working in the NSW Rural Fire Service Emergency Operations Centres, Essential Energy could access real-time information. This information was packaged and sent to local media channels and updated on the Essential Energy website and social media channels. Customers with long-term power outages were provided with generators and in some remote locations with significant network damage, Essential Energy deployed stand-alone power systems.

EVOenergy: Evoenergy Citizens' Jury



Principal company

EVOenergy

Name of project

Evoenergy Citizens' Jury

Project partners

Communication Link

Project timeline

October – November 2019.
Citizens' Jury participants are still playing an active role in Evoenergy's consumer engagement activities.

Location

Canberra, ACT

Description

Evoenergy owns and operates the gas distribution network in the ACT and surrounding areas. Within its gas network 2021-26 regulatory review consumer engagement program, Evoenergy sought to understand consumer needs and expectations amid an uncertain future for the distribution of natural gas. Evoenergy braved uncharted territory to undertake and form a citizens' jury. This process established a new consumer engagement benchmark for Evoenergy, providing meaningful, relevant community feedback.

Benefit to consumers

Evoenergy felt it needed to understand if previously held consumer expectations had changed and to reflect the views of the next generation of consumers in our planning. The Citizens' Jury amplified community member voices by placing their views at the centre of Evoenergy's network planning. Evoenergy decided to undertake a citizens' jury knowing that the highly deliberative nature of the process would be instrumental in the development of the gas network plan.

Approach

The Citizens' Jury gathered in-depth feedback from over 20,000 customers connected to the gas and/or electricity network. 120 expressions of interest were received. An independent recruitment process assembled a 29 member jury that reflected the ACT's diverse community.

Over two weekends, the Jury considered:

A fair and transparent process gave jurors the power to design and determine the nature of their involvement. Jurors nominated discussion topics, questions and experts from whom they would receive presentations. Jurors wrote their own recommendations report and submitted separate recommendations to the ACT Government, although not within the original jury scope.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

The Jury recommendations provided Evoenergy with an insight into what customers and community want and need from the gas network, against the backdrop of the ACT Government's legislated target of net zero emissions by 2045.

The Jury's report made eight clear recommendations to Evoenergy with the Jury's recommendations report formally responded to by Evoenergy and the ACT Minister for Climate Change in April 2020. The ACT Minister for Climate Change remarked the Jury's contribution 'will substantially shape the future directions of the ACT's energy system'.

The Citizens' Jury model allowed Evoenergy to gain a deeper understanding of customer and community needs and expectations when it comes to gas services and preferences.

Evoenergy now has access to the views and expectations of one of energy's most important stakeholders, the consumer, and represents a leading-edge example of consumer engagement for addressing the issue of climate change to Australia and the world.

Leadership and transferability

The Evoenergy leadership team committed to ensuring an open, transparent, and robust process. This was achieved by investing in expert citizens' jury facilitators, involving subject matter experts and leaders, and establishing a governance framework and an advisory panel to guide and advise on process design and continual improvement.

The legacy of the citizens' jury challenges traditional engagement process assumptions that community members can make limited contributions to complex discussions.

Jemena: COVID-19 Community Response



Principal company

Jemena

Name of project

COVID-19 Community Response

Project partners

- » Australian Energy Foundation (AEF)
- » Brotherhood of Saint Laurence
- » Electric & Water Ombudsman Victoria (EWOV)
- » Energy Charter
- » Saint Vincent de Paul
- » Uniting Victoria & Tasmania
- » Anne MacBean – independent oversight providing insights into aged care

Project timeline

March 2020-July 2020

Location

Jemena's Electricity Network located in the inner north and west of Melbourne, Victoria.

Description

The diversity of Jemena Electricity Network's customer base of 350,000+ households and businesses in Melbourne's north-west presented a unique challenge in how to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did Jemena need to maintain an essential service but also needed to support people within culturally diverse communities. Understanding these challenges, Jemena led a dynamic program of solutions delivered in collaboration with industry and community known as "COVID-19 Community Response".

Benefit to consumers

As a provider of an essential service, Jemena recognised a need to empower all consumers through access to meaningful information and support. The formation of the COVID-19 Community Response Group (CRG) allowed Jemena to understand the levers of vulnerability and meaningfully support people by communicating with them in a format they could readily understand. This included customers on life support, CALD groups, people with disabilities, socially isolated and ageing. As a result, customers from all walks of life have been connected to information and solutions that have assisted them through the pandemic.

Approach

The response group established three key principles to use appropriate communications channels, make it simple and take a joint industry approach. Jemena worked with key community advocacy and welfare groups, partners, local councils and industry associations to form a coalition to support the communities in which they operate. Jemena's aim was to ensure that everyone in the community was aware of the support available to them and collaborated with community stakeholders to disseminate material via their channels to target the most vulnerable people through channels they'd trust.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

Without listening to customers, it could have been assumed that the delivery of the network support package was "enough". By engaging with the CRG, Jemena recognised that whilst this support package was substantial and meaningful for many, there were still gaps in both communication and solutions. This feedback resulted in Jemena providing communications (with advice from the CRG) for the first time via CALD community radio and press, extended into key industry wide messages for CALD languages and supporting people with disabilities by working in conjunction with VALID, to develop specialised comms.

Results and Outcomes:

- » By implementing targeted customer communications at key stages of the customer journey, ensures people are aware of upcoming planned outages and can plan their lives accordingly. In an industry first, Jemena deployed portable batteries for life support customers or those working in essential services to use during planned outages.

Benefit and Impact:

- » Feedback from across the industry and community has been positive and established new working practices at Jemena ensures they continue to understand the community and work with partners across the industry to support delivery.

Leadership and transferability

It's rare that an organisation has the opportunity to live all its values simultaneously - the pandemic has allowed Jemena to do so. The pandemic allowed us to actively becoming a caring member of the community, listening to their concerns and responding. The strongest evidence of living Jemena values was this: all of the work was conducted by team members in addition to their substantive roles without any incentive other than to meaningfully support our community.

Jemena: Jemena's Kendall Bay Sediment Remediation Project



Principal company

Jemena

Name of project

Jemena's Kendall Bay Sediment Remediation Project

Project partners

Ventia Utility Services Pty Limited, WSP Australia Pty Limited, Geosyntec Consultants, Keller Group, Polaris Marine, Clement Marine Constructions, Cleanway, AusBarge Marine Services, ASO Marine Consultants, Royal HaskoningDHV, Coffey, JK Geotechnics, Melrose Cranes & Rigging and Taylor Civil & Structural.

Project timeline

September 2019 – December 2020 (project delivery phase)

Location

Kendall Bay, NSW

Description

The operations of the former Mortlake Gasworks resulted in impact to sediment in Kendall Bay. Assessments showed sediment in certain areas posed potential ecological and human health risk and therefore required remediation. Jemena took on the responsibility of the clean-up and undertook a full-scale engagement process that recognised the importance of community of Breakfast Point and the need to minimise the impacts of the work on the community.

Benefit to consumers

The project objective was to complete remediation to address the potential risks and improve the public amenity of the Bay. From initiation of the project, Jemena set out on a journey of engaging, consulting and listening to the views and concerns of the community.

Approach

A Stakeholder Management Plan was developed during the initial stages of the project to define the engagement strategy and included identification of key stakeholders. Jemena formed a Community Liaison Group comprising 22 members from various interest groups within the local community. The team used a vast array of communication mediums to disseminate information including websites, community noticed boards and local media.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

The evidence of Jemena's successful stakeholder engagement strategy is the regular supportive and positive feedback received from community members and the very limited number of formal complaints received. There has been a large amount of positive feedback received from the community thanking the project team for keeping them informed of the works, listening to their feedback, and delivering the project per the timeline committed to. Of the small amount of complaints received all were responded to within 24 hours.

Difference the project has made to the community

The project has achieved the remediation objectives to clean up the Bay and has addressed the potential ecological and human health risk posed by historical contamination within the sediment. The visual amenity of the southern beach area has been enhanced and the project has provided a goodwill benefit with the repair to a section of seawall undertaken on their behalf – providing a significant cost saving to the local community. The benefits of the remediation works will be enjoyed by generations of local residents to come. Kendall Bay provides an important recreational space for the community and is an important habitat for local wildlife.

Leadership and transferability

The Jemena project team worked hard to put themselves in the shoes of the stakeholder to understand the concern being raised. Key learnings showed the project team the importance of listening and acting on stakeholder feedback to build trust.

Compiling the right project team with different and diverse skills has greatly benefited the project. A full-time experienced community liaison manager was employed by Jemena and has been critical to the support we have received from the community. A fundamental Jemena value is "Customer focus" which means we consider our customers in everything we do. Our leadership team and organisation culture encourage and respect the time and effort to establish an appropriate engagement strategy. Regular project reviews are held with the Jemena leadership team to ensure the Jemena values are being met.

SA Power Networks: Consultation on the 10 year review of the Electricity (Principles of Vegetation Clearance) Regulations 2010



Principal company

SA Power Networks

Name of project

Consultation on the 10 year review of the *Electricity (Principles of Vegetation Clearance) Regulations 2010*

Project partners

Office of the Technical Regulator (OTR)
SA Power Networks Arborist Reference Group and Local Government Association Working Group

Project timeline

June 2018 - August 2019

Location

South Australia

Description

Vegetation clearance is a significant concern for customers. The *Electricity (Principles of Vegetation Clearance) Regulations 2010* is the key legislation governing vegetation clearance near powerlines in South Australia and expires on 1 September 2021. The expiration of the legislation provides SA Power Network with the opportunity to ensure the regulations are 'fit for purpose' and deliver the best outcomes possible for electricity consumers and the people of South Australia.

Benefit to consumers

SA Power Network's vegetation management practices have, at times, resulted in complaints from local councils and the community in relation to the visual impact of vegetation management. It also bears a significant cost to consumer. SAPN set about putting forward proposed amendments to the legislation that would help reduce the cost and the impact to community. Overall, there was a community sentiment, shared by SAPN that current regulation meant pruning needed to occur more than what is necessary.

Approach

The key objective of SAPN's engagement was to work collaboratively with consultative groups and key stakeholders to reform the regulations. SA Power Networks developed its thinking on the 10-year review of the clearance regulations through a committed program of consultation with stakeholders including members of the public, local and state governments. The consultation program also included discussion papers, workshops, briefings, and a bus tour. The bus tour enabled stakeholders to view the current clearance requirements and the unsatisfactory result of over pruning. Attendees included Conservation Council, Native Vegetation Council and Department of Environment and Water as well as members of our consultative groups and the OTR. The aim was to foster an open discussion on the proposed amendments.

Benefits, results, and outcomes

Vegetation management is a major source of community frustration and concern. In 2013 vegetation clearance complaints were approximately 15 per cent of all complaints received by SA Power Networks and through a collaborative approach, complaints have fallen to around 3.9 per cent in 2020.

Throughout SAPN's engagement on the 10 year review, there was strong support from all stakeholders to improve tree management outcomes around powerlines. There was also strong support for ensuring that the regulations are shaped in a way that facilitates the safest and most visually appealing outcome.

Leadership and transferability

SA Power Networks engagement highlighted the value of open, honest and transparent engagement with diverse stakeholders with at times diverging views. The proposed amendments will maintain or improve safety outcomes whilst reducing costs and trees being trimmed, lower costs for customers and improve community outcomes.

SA Power Networks engagement model was recognised as an example of good engagement by the Australian Energy Regulator and is a model that could be adopted by other distributed network service providers in managing vegetation around powerlines.

Western Power: Western Power's Community Battery program



Principal company

Western Power

Name of project

Western Power's Community Battery program

Project partners

Synergy

Project timeline

2018-2020 and beyond

Location

Western Australia

Funding

Western Power funded

Description

The growth of renewables is changing the way energy is generated, delivered and stored. Currently one in three households in Western Australia has rooftop solar. In WA, Western Power is managing this uptake of solar through an innovative community battery program which has seen the rollout of 13 community batteries across 10 local government authorities in the last two years. The batteries directly support the network, with three of them (to-date) providing customers with solar storage product through retail partner Synergy.

Benefit to consumers

The community battery program began as a trial in 2018 and was an Australian-first in integrating bulk solar battery storage into an existing grid. Western Power currently has three community batteries installed where customers are able to store excess solar power generated during the day and draw down on this during the peak evening period. The program enables consumers to store and share electricity derived from their solar PVs. Having access to a community battery means customers benefit from power storage, without upfront home battery storage system costs.

Approach

A critical component in delivering and achieving success for this project is early engagement across stakeholders including customers, energy retailers, industry and local and state governments. Western Power's Grid Transformation Team was engaged to undertake modelling and cost analysis to build a business case for Executive, Board, energy regulators and Government to undertake a trial. Location was selected based on the amount of rooftop solar, customer interest, network maintenance and collaboration with LGAs. Synergy developed the retail product and recruited participants. Through effective promotion, including direct mail and community days, the trial was fully subscribed within two weeks with 50 households. The battery program benefits the entire community, whether they have solar panels or not, by providing a more reliable network and increasing solar hosting capacity. Western Power has ensured locations contain a mix of metro and regional locations and socio-economic demographics. Western Power worked with Tesla for battery supply and West Australia Alternate Energy for onsite installation, monitoring and maintenance of the batteries.

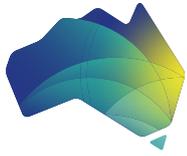
Benefits, results, and outcomes

The benefit to Western Power's customers was significant including cost saving benefits when customers were able to store power without having to outlay significant cost for a home battery and flexible pricing tariffs. From a network perspective, the local transformer load has decreased, and the batteries help maintain voltage levels improve customer power quality and increase network solar hosting capacity. Community batteries could unlock close to a 100 percent renewable world. And Western Power's program supports local economic growth by engaging local business in batteries installation and generates environmental benefits by paving the way for greater renewables uptake.

Leadership and transferability

Western Power's community battery program is unique in that it accesses multiple value streams in one solution. These values include network, energy market and customer offering. The strategic rationale was to integrate storage into the grid in the most cost-effective manner with the vision of reducing whole-of-system energy costs and put downward pressure on tariffs. Key learnings have been extensive including better understanding customers and their energy experiences. They have an appetite for on-grid storage options and LGAs are interested in playing a role. In partnership with Synergy, Western Power has developed customer focused product pricing and communications.





Energy
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