

## **Call for Innovation**

### **Background**

Electricity North West Limited is one of 14 distribution network operators in Great Britain. We own and operate the network in the North West of England – from the Lake District down to Stockport – including around 56,000km of overhead and underground network and nearly 500 major substations. We are one of the most reliable distribution network operators (DNOs) in the country with a reputation for leading on innovation, and we continuously strive to deliver an excellent service to our customers.

To ensure that we keep up with the needs and expectations of our customers, and ambitious zero-carbon targets set by the government, it is essential that we find innovative ways to manage our network and the challenges we face.

Our track-record for innovation is impressive – our projects have successfully delivered around £45m in benefits to customers so far – but as the energy landscape continues to evolve, we must continue to look for ways to improve.

### **Innovation Funding Mechanisms**

Besides our own money, there are various external mechanisms available for funding of innovation. One source being the Network Innovation Allowance (NIA) provided by Ofgem. All projects must meet Ofgem’s specific eligibility requirements.

Given to us in the form of an allowance, the NIA funds shorter-term projects with a lower Technology Readiness Level (TRL), and projects which require a small-scale demonstration with reasonably rapid turnaround, costing up to £2m. The NIA would fund smaller technical, commercial, or operational projects directly related to our network and which have the potential to deliver financial benefits to our customers, and will be available throughout ED2.

### **What is this?**

We will endeavour to issue an annual call for innovation to third-parties. Within the bounds of the Ofgem rules, the call is open to all-comers, and we are particularly keen to hear from smaller organisations, possibly based locally here in the North West, that might benefit from the financial support and partnering opportunities afforded by innovation funding. The size of the call will likely vary from year to year, and we can’t guarantee to run a call each year. But we hope we can provide further opportunity for third parties to engage with us regarding their ideas, and that we can work together on a project or provide helpful feedback, allowing the idea to be refined further for future consideration both here and elsewhere.

### **Focus Areas**

We would encourage you to refer to our [innovation strategy](#), which contains guidance on the future challenges and opportunities we believe ought to be a priority and where we propose to focus our innovation activities in the coming years. If you believe your idea can help in one of more of these areas, then we’d be delighted to hear from you, either as part of this call or through our innovation mailbox, which remains open to third-parties all year round.

To help focus things a little, we are currently looking for projects with a maximum value of £150k that can be delivered before the end of March 2023. We envisage these projects being desktop studies which could inform future larger-scale projects. There are some key areas in which we are currently looking to innovate:

#### *Consumer Vulnerability*

As the UK moves to a more interconnected and flexible electricity system it is important to ensure that vulnerable customers are not left behind. We are looking for ways in which we can better understand

the needs of our vulnerable customers, and how vulnerability may change in the future as the energy system evolves. This will assist us in ensuring a fair and equitable transition to a low carbon future.

### *Data*

As part of the energy system transition, the access to, and use of, data is a key enabler to managing and operating an increasingly active network. To help focus the challenge in this area we have developed a number of questions which require investigation:

- i. How can data sets be used to plan and operate our networks more efficiently & effectively?
- ii. How can data be used to provide additional understanding of real-time network and asset conditions and to inform new standards?
- iii. What is the appropriate data hierarchy?
- iv. How can we facilitate third-party access to data?

### **Scope**

If you have an idea that could help us solve a problem in one of our focus areas or more broadly, as detailed in our strategy, we would love to hear from you. Please follow the link below to complete our Call for Innovation submission form.

We will carefully consider all ideas submitted to us and endeavour to provide feedback to all parties. In addition, any ideas submitted will be treated as confidential and we will respect fully any intellectual property of the originator, regardless of whether we choose to progress with an application for funding.

We are looking for a short description of the problem your idea is looking to solve, a description of how the solution will work, an estimate of the timeline and cost of the project, an idea of the potential partners we will need to get on board (i.e. who will produce the product, if applicable), and an outline of the potential project benefits.

We anticipate a high number of submissions to this call, and so we ask that you please use our submission form to give us time to consider all submissions.

For more information about our Innovation team and our previous projects, please visit our website: <https://www.enwl.co.uk/go-net-zero/innovation/>

The submission form is linked [here](#).

### **What happens next**

Our Call for Innovation will close on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022, at which point we will start the careful consideration of all responses. We aim to contact you within 60 days to let you know whether or not we wish to proceed with an application to fund your idea. Please note that we will endeavour to provide feedback if requested but, depending on the volume, it may not be possible to answer all questions received.