



A. Promoting and facilitating the collective approach

This chapter is primarily relevant to you if you have the role of a **Multiplier Organization**. This means that you belong to an organization that has the interest to inspire and establish energy efficiency initiatives in SMEs and the capacity to communicate and scale up the experiences on the regional or national level, such as an SME association, energy authority, (local) government, NGO or research organization.

As a Multiplier Organization you have an ambition – as part of your organization’s mission – to support SMEs in becoming more economically viable and/or to foster energy efficiency, sustainability or reduction of climate change in SMEs. In addition, you have realized that using a collective approach towards reaching and supporting SMEs is a viable strategy that can contribute to your mission. Therefore, you have decided to dedicate time and resources to spreading the methodology to relevant clusters of SMEs and their Trusted Partners.

Before you start working directly with identifying relevant clusters of SMEs, you need to have a clear ambition and focus for your efforts. This means that you should, for instance, determine:

- Your primary purpose and goals for reaching out to the SMEs;
- The primary benefits you expect to achieve for your organization, the SMEs and the Trusted Partners;
- The resources your organization will put into these efforts – if it primarily will be a communication effort or development of a structured programme; and
- The overall focus of the collectives and the type of support offered.

Below, we call this your **offer** to the Trusted Partners and SME clusters that you approach. The strategic work of developing your offer is probably integral to the work of your organization. If you need support in developing it, the methods described in B.3 under Chapter B are applicable.

In this chapter, we focus on activities that are directly linked to the identification, motivation and support needed for contributing to the initiation of local SME energy collectives. This will be presented in two parts:

- **Identifying relevant SME clusters and Trusted Partners.** Firstly, the potential of existing SME clusters and networks is evaluated. Secondly, you identify potential Trusted Partners for these networks, assess their potential to take on this role and motivate them to engage in the initiative. Thirdly, potential external barriers and opportunities for the initiative are identified. For details about all these activities, see Section A.1.



- **Organizing and developing long-term support** for the energy collectives. To achieve well-functioning collectives, the Trusted Partners will need long-term support. This can be provided directly from your organization or from other organizations that you identify. Either way, you need to have a plan for how to organize, develop and provide the support needed. For more details, see Section A.2.

A.1 Identifying relevant SME clusters and Trusted Partners

<p>Short description</p>	<p>You evaluate the potential of new collectives, by looking at existing SME clusters, potential Trusted Partners, and existing support and barriers. The aim is to engage a Trusted Partner for a local SME energy collective.</p>
<p>Tools provided</p>	<p>A future energy collective initiative – Trusted Partner bilateral discussion guideline (Appendix A.1)</p>

Local SME energy collectives come in many forms and shapes across Europe. This step focuses on assessing existing SME clusters and networks and Trusted Partners related to those clusters (Section A.1.2). Existing SME clusters or networks and their Trusted Partners might not currently be focusing on energy efficiency, but provide an excellent starting point for a local energy collective, because of the network strength and/or the Trusted Partner skills. Another set of qualifiers can be found in existing policy support or parallel SME supporting initiatives (Section A.1.3). As shown below, it is not a straightforward process in which you will find a Trusted Partner and a list of SMEs that want to work together. These items are all pieces of a puzzle (see Figure 1) that has multiple feasible (=good) outcomes.

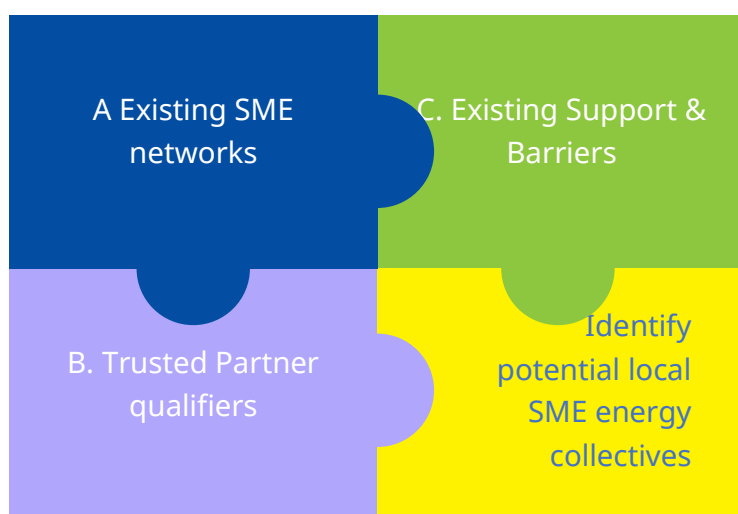


Figure 1. The process of identifying potential local SME energy collectives.



Examples: Identifying a suitable Trusted Partner for an industrial park

In the Motzener Straße industry park in Germany, the SMEs founded an association to revitalise and strengthen the industry park. The association has a coordinating role among the SMEs but also acts as a facilitator. The NEMo project (in German: Null Emission Motzener Straße) was a project launched by the association on the subject of climate protection. A climate manager was put in charge of identifying measures in the companies and supporting their implementation. Both the climate manager and the entire association are suitable Trusted Partner for the local collective.

In the Roveri industrial district (Italy), companies are affiliated to various industrial associations operating in Italy. The Trusted Partner identified for the local collective is a member of one of these industrial associations, and already acts as an advisor for all her affiliated companies for matters concerning safety and the environment.

The Ponte a Egola industrial park (Italy) is a homogeneous industrial area with more than 100 companies (mainly SMEs) active in tannery or businesses related to the tannery industry. Many companies are interested in fostering energy cooperation solutions, and the park has been awarded as an Eco-Industrial Park. The key stakeholder of the project is a public-private consortium that includes approximately 80 companies located in the local municipalities. The consortium has been appointed as Park Manager and is a suitable Trusted Partner for the local collective of SMEs.

A.1.1 Evaluate the potential of existing SME clusters and networks (both national and local)

Developing a network from scratch can be incredibly difficult. SMEs can be hesitant to enter a new network or association they are not familiar with, sometimes simply because they do not have the time or resources to prioritize getting involved in new collectives if the connection with their core business is not immediately clear. It is therefore important to try and collaborate with organizations the SMEs are already familiar with and trust. This means that you try to align a local SME energy collective with existing formal or more informal clusters of SMEs and the (potential) Trusted Partners that are linked to these clusters. The boundaries and structures of local SME clusters are often not crisp and clear. It can also help to align with existing sector associations or other types of associations present at an industrial area or business park.

To get more insight into the potential of a specific SME cluster, you, as a representative for the Multiplier Organization, could ask the questions in the table below. The more 'yes' answers you write down, the higher the potential of the SME cluster to serve as a starting point for initiating a local SME collective. The main aspects you want to get insight into are the "level of collectiveness" and how the cluster is currently organized. A strong and active network of SMEs is a good starting point for a local energy collective.



Minimum Requirements	Yes/No
Does the cluster of SMEs include between 10 and a few hundred SMEs?	
Is the network of SMEs confined to a local, geographic, area?	
Are the SMEs voluntary member of the network because of the (perceived) added value?	
Is there regular contact between these members? Are there for instance general meetings or yearly recurring activities?	
Extra qualifiers	
Do the SMEs have an aligned ambition with regards to energy efficiency?	
Is the network of SMEs organized with a formal, common management?	
Is the network connected to other national/regional organizations or programs focusing on SME and/or EE support?	
Can the network of SMEs influence individual members?	
Does the network of SMEs already participate in energy-related activities together?	

A.1.2 Identify and engage potential Trusted Partners

Next to a cluster of SMEs, you also need to identify a Trusted Partner for the energy collective. As explained in the introduction, a Trusted Partner can be a regional or local authority, an Energy Service Supplier, or the management of an existing SME network or business park. Make sure you consider any organizations or stakeholders that already act as a Trusted Partner towards the group of SMEs you are targeting (e.g. in other matters than energy).

When you have identified a *potential* Trusted Partner, it is important to start a dialogue to learn more about him/her (and the organization). The most important aspects for successful coordination of the local energy collective are whether the Trusted Partner is motivated, trusted by the SMEs, and has the capabilities and expertise to organize a local collective (or people in his or her network that can support with this).¹ Moreover, to motivate and, ultimately, engage the Trusted Partner, it is also highly relevant to find out *why* approaching energy efficiency for this group of SMEs would be interesting to him/her.

In summary, an initial assessment is needed, based on which a realistic expectation of the potential role of the Trusted Partner in this specific collective can be built. Please keep in mind that he/she is the main actor in developing a successful energy collective and before reaching out to the SMEs, the Trusted Partner needs to be fully motivated and engaged. Below, you will find support for making such an initial assessment in dialogue with the potential Trusted Partner.

¹ The three main factors of trustworthiness: Ability; Benevolence; Integrity, identified in Mayer et al. (1995), translates into that the Trusted Partner need to be able to influence the group of SMEs; to be believed to want to do good for the SMEs; and be perceived by the SMEs as adhering to a set of principles that the SMEs find acceptable. Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., and Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust. *The Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 709. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258792>



To get more insight into the potential capabilities, expertise and motivation of a Trusted Partner, you could ask the questions listed below. These questions are not set in stone and should preferably be used as a guideline for a direct conversation, a bilateral meeting, or call, with the purpose of getting to know the Trusted Partner. Before the meeting, you should have prepared your offer, information about available support (see Section A.2), and other general arguments (see also Introduction). After the meeting, decide together how to continue your dialogue and what the next step is. The more **'yes' answers you write down, the higher the potential** of the Trusted Partner. A more detailed guideline, can be found in Appendix A.1.

Minimum Requirements	Yes/No
Are you currently connected to and familiar with members of the SME network?	
Are you interested in (and motivated about) coordinating a local collective of SMEs?	
Are you interested in (and motivated about) energy-related subjects?	
Would you say that SMEs in your network see you as a Trusted Partner?	
Extra qualifiers	
(If applicable) Do you currently organize activities & services for the SME network?	
Do you have expertise in organizing and coordinating a collective of SMEs? In what way?	
Do you have expertise in energy-related subjects? In what way?	
In your own network, do you have connections to stakeholders that could play a role in setting up the collective/supporting the SMEs/helping with the organization of energy projects? (see Section XX for stakeholders that could play a role)	
Do you have (concrete) ideas for shaping a local energy collective?	
Do you have sufficient resources for being the coordinator (Trusted Partner) in the local energy collective?	

The motivational aspects for the organization or actor to be interested in the role as the Trusted Partner may be linked to different values and drivers. Some examples can be:

- A desire to support the companies to improve their business case by increasing overall productivity and improving customer value.
- A more direct focus on reducing the SMEs operational costs by decreasing energy and maintenance costs.
- An interest in contributing to sustainable development and reduced climate impact by decreasing energy use and shifting to renewable energy sources.

Finally, to find out how the Trusted Partner is perceived by the SMEs, you could also consider asking questions to a (few) SME(s) at the area you are targeting:

- Would you say that you trust that this person will take into account the benefits for SMEs, is reliable, etc.
- Would you say this person is a good coordinator for a group of SMEs in your area, based on his/her (technical/organizational) skills and competences?



Though it is probably not always necessary, talking to SMEs can be insightful for evaluating the Trusted Partner and, even more important, the relationship between the Trusted Partner and the SMEs.

A.1.3 Identify potential starting points from external barriers and opportunities

In preparing to develop potential energy collective, it is also important to understand the external context in which the Trusted Partner and the cluster of SMEs might start a local energy collective. This concerns understanding general opportunities and barriers for a successful local energy collective, as well as understanding the typical needs and energy efficiency maturity of participating SMEs. The latter are important factors: a potential case for a local energy collective is after all one in which the SMEs have needs that the local energy collective can address and in which their energy efficiency can be increased.

As a Multiplier Organization, striving to identify a potential case, it is probably enough to gather background information on SMEs in the same context, whether this is a certain sector, geographical region, etc. What is currently happening regarding energy efficiency in this context? In some countries, this information is available through national or regional energy agencies or national or regional entrepreneurial agencies. For more information about assessing conditions for *specific* SMEs, see the table in Chapter B. The general areas described in this table are applicable also for the more general picture, however, the level of detail and information sources will differ.

In addition, it is insightful to understand barriers and opportunities for a local energy collective. Barriers are factors that discourage stakeholders initiating a local energy collective, such as the administrative burden and a lack of resources (time/money). Opportunities mostly come in the form of funding possibilities and supportive initiatives and policies. It is important to add that the barriers for increasing energy efficiency experienced by *individual* SMEs might be overcome by the local energy collective.

Questions you could ask yourself and search for answers to include:

Questions
What is the <i>typical</i> energy maturity of SMEs in the same context, e.g. in the same region or sector
What are the barriers for SMEs in the same context to implement energy efficiency measures (and would a local energy collective help to take some of these away?)
Are local energy collectives in your country/region eligible for funding?
(AND/OR) Are there direct financial incentives for SMEs to improve energy efficiency?
Are there strict policies/targets that SMEs should meet regarding energy efficiency?



A.2 Organizing and developing long-term support

Short description	You make sure you have a clear plan for how to provide long-term support to the collectives initiated and their Trusted Partners.
Tools provided	—

As a Multiplier Organization, you can take various strategic actions to foster the initiation of new local SME energy collectives. In developing these actions, you need to present an [offer](#) to the Trusted Partners and SME clusters. This offer will most likely include some kind of [long-term support](#). Long-term support can be provided at different levels and include different types of support.

The GEAR@SME project has identified needs that Trusted Partners may have, depending on their specific background and situation. These include:

- Enabling support relating to all the aspects of organizing and running an energy collective as described in this handbook, such as organizational and communication activities and skills (see Chapters B, C and D).
- Enabling support in all the areas where SMEs need support from the Trusted Partner, such as increased knowledge about the process of increasing energy efficiency in SMEs (see Chapter E).
- People to discuss plans, activities and hurdles with, on a continuous basis.

In general terms, the type of support that can cater for the needs above often include:

- Making knowledge and supporting tools available via [handbooks and web-sites](#). Many Multiplier Organizations, national energy agencies, sector associations, and universities collect relevant knowledge and material in a structured way.
- Providing [training and seminars](#) for the Trusted Partners, including opportunities for networking and exchange of experience. You could provide this type of support by organizing and offering training sessions yourself, by providing funding for the Trusted Partners to participate in training that is available from other organizations, or by simply making information available to the Trusted Partners about which training opportunities are available and where to find them. Governmental agencies, sector associations, and universities often organize events on specific relevant topics. Examples of highly relevant topics that might be less self-evident to focus on are: the *multiple benefits from energy efficiency* improvements; and the complex provisions linked to *applying for funding* from e.g. European funds. Training on these topics may also be especially relevant to offer to Energy Service Suppliers.



- **Communication** efforts aimed at keeping Trusted Partners up to date with information about policy changes, funding opportunities, good examples, best practices, etc., via for instance a regular newsletter.
- Providing online support for developing a **Trusted Partner community** for peer support and exchange of knowledge, networking and experience. Such a community could be developed specifically for the Trusted Partners supported by your organization, or you could inform about potential communities available elsewhere.
- **Financial support** to the Trusted Partners, to make it possible for them to put in the time needed to take these actions and to run a successful local energy SME collective. Your support could be part of a structured programme, in which all engaged Trusted Partners receive a certain level of funding; it could include the possibility to apply for funding; or your support could focus on making information available about potential funding opportunities and help to apply for these funds.

This handbook and the online 'Energy Efficient SME' portal are specifically designed to facilitate the long-term provision of the above-mentioned support to Trusted Partners, without cost. In addition to the support of the handbook, the portal will provide advice and guidance and include multiple tools, best practices, lessons learned, training materials and a Trusted Partner community platform. The community platform, which will be established as a part of the GEAR@SME project objectives, intends to give peer-to-peer support and knowledge sharing concerning how to initiate and operate a local SME energy collective, as well as to give potential added value in form of an accessible network also for other issues.

Based on this overview, you can then specify the type and level of long-term support that your organization will include in its offer to the Trusted Partner. The level and organization of support can differ widely, depending on the type of organization you represent and the needs you see. What is important is that you determine and communicate what will be available and how, and then deliver on this. More specifically, you need to describe:

- The type of support, including potential funding or economic support, you will be able to provide to the collectives and the Trusted Partners, and;
- If there will be any specific conditions linked to receiving this support (e.g. goals for the collectives, activities that should be included, co-funding or reporting requirements).



Lastly, it should be mentioned that the experience from various support programs for energy efficiency in SMEs shows that it is a long-term work, and the effects can often be measured years after a specific initiative has ended. It is therefore important to set up initiatives for an extended period and to have a long-term plan for evaluation of results and measures at least a year after the end of a project.

Example: Energy Efficiency Networks (Sweden)

Energy Efficiency Networks (EENet) is a Swedish national initiative, co-funded between the Swedish Energy Agency (SEA) and the National regional fund programme. Within the EENet initiative, local/regional energy efficiency networks (consisting of 8 - 12 SMEs) were initiated, set-up and run for about four years.

The networks are run by regional coordinators (acting as Trusted Partners), who organize network meetings, act as important motivator and support the companies in their energy efficiency work at a more general level. The profile of the coordinators varies quite strongly between networks: in some cases they have technical and/or energy related background, in other cases they are experienced process leaders, focusing more on the organizational and motivation aspects of the network.

The SEA, who has the role as a Multiplier Organization, helps the coordinators with a support program and sharing lessons learned from the various regional energy networks. Depending on the needs of the regional coordinator, the SEA can educate them in specific capabilities and knowledge, enabling them to be effective network leaders. The SEA was able to create this support program by utilizing expert consultants for monitoring tasks, in training activities directed at the coordinators (including both technical areas and motivation techniques and employee engagement), and for development of guides and information material.



APPENDIX A.1: A future energy collective initiative – Trusted Partner bilateral discussions guideline

The following material should be used by the Multiplier Organization to realistically assess their Trusted Partner, where it is necessary. There is a general concern among the Multiplier Organization regarding the level of Trusted Partner implication during the activities induced by **future energy collective initiative** consortium. Moreover, it is not clear yet the amount of resources the Trusted Partner is willing to allocate and what are their expectations during the project lifetime. It is important to mention that this template/guideline should be fulfilled with the conclusions following the bilateral meetings between the Trusted Partner and Multiplier Organization. *It is not a questionnaire!*

Main topics to be addressed:

	Objective to identify	Status
1	The organizational model of the Trusted Partner	
2	Projection of future energy collective initiative through the eyes of the Trusted Partner	
3	Realistic quantification of the Trusted Partner expectations regarding the future energy collective initiative	
4	The level of effort the Trusted Partner is willing to dedicate to future energy collective initiative induced activities	
5	Description of the energy efficiency „foundation” at the level of Trusted Partner	



I. Short description of each proposed topic:

1. The organizational model of the Trusted Partner with respect of energy efficiency matter

The Multiplier Organization will gather basic information regarding the organizational structure of their Trusted Partner. The briefing will contain the following information:

- Private/Public institution;
 - If they have an internal energy efficiency office;
 - If the answer is affirmative at the previous point: if they sold energy services (consultancy etc) to subordinate SMEs;
 - If the answer is negative at the previous point: if are they willing to create an energy efficiency office;
 - If there is a full-time job energy manager hired If the answer is positive please briefly describe his tasks within the industrial park;
 - If the answer is negative at the previous point: if are they willing to hire an energy efficiency manager and in what conditions;
 - If they have collaboration protocols with energy suppliers (electricity, natural gas, etc).
 - If they are engaged in collective organizations (energy, stakeholders, etc.)
2. Projection of future energy collective initiative through the eyes of the Trusted Partner (where applicable)

During the discussion with Trusted Partner each Multiplier Organization will identify the concept of the GEAR@SME concept through the eyes of the Trusted Partner. The Multiplier Organization should be able to gather the information describing the opinion of the Trusted Partnered regarding GEAR@SME project:

- How they foresee the implementation of the project within their industrial park (project applicability through Trusted Partner eyes);
- How they see their role as Trusted Partner during the project lifetime;
- How they see their role with respect to taking energy efficiency (EE) and renewable energy (RE) measures in a collective or individual way during the project lifetime;

In their opinion, what should be the first steps towards a local energy collective;

- Based on what they know already about the SMEs involved in the project and on previous experiences, which types of activities were successful in the park? (seminars, workshops, etc)



3. Realistic quantification of the Trusted Partner expectations regarding the future energy collective initiative

Each Multiplier Organization will realistically quantify the expectations of the Trusted Partner during the project lifetime. Based on the information gathered the Multiplier Organization should be able to clearly describe the following topics:

- What benefits does Trusted Partner expect from the GEAR@SME project? Brief description (this information should be useful also for the Handbook);
4. The level of effort the Trusted Partner is willing to dedicate to the future energy collective induced activities

The level of the activation of Trusted Partners from the use cases greatly differs from one country to another. Moreover, in order to play an active role during GEAR@SME project an important amount of resources should be invested by the Trusted Partner:

- human resource;
- time disponibility;
- financial resource;

Are they willing to allocate the necessary resources? Which of the above resources represents a challenge for the Trusted Partner? It is important to assess the Trusted Partner from the resource availability point of view.

5. Description of the energy efficiency „foundation” at the level of Trusted Partner

The main purpose of the current topic is to identify the suitable Trusted Partner approaching technique regarding the future energy collective in order to create a realistic baseline: from where certain Multiplier Organization should begin the Trusted Partner activation towards engaging an energy collective approach within their industrial park (where applicable). The Multiplier Organization should be able to adress the following topics:

- If they have an approach or strategy for energy efficiency and renewable energy? Is it in a certain sense incorporated in the way of working?
- If they have personal contact with organizations in their local area about measures regarding energy efficiency (EE) and renewable energy (RE)?
- To what extent were they satisfied with the services of the Energy Service Supplier(s)?
- If they are aware of initiatives in their local area to stimulate cooperation among SMEs, or between SMEs and Energy Service Suppliers, in taking measures regarding EE and RE?



- Are there any local or regional targets regarding EE and RES which are influencing future plans and strategies? For example SECAP (Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan), GCAP (Green City Action Plan) or any other similar plan/strategy?
- If they are involved in any other type of (business) network(s), perhaps on a national or even international scale, in which EE and RE are discussion topics?
- What are the plans of Trusted Partner for the near future regarding energy efficiency? Possible integration in GEAR@SME project.



II. Observations and special mentions (if necessary) / Conclusions on strengths & areas in need of support

Strengths of the Trusted Partner

Areas in which the Trusted Partner may need additional support/development

III. Meeting attendance: