



# Adjusted methodology – Guidelines for implementing the revised GEAR@SME methodology

**GEAR@SME: GENERATE ENERGY EFFICIENT ACTING AND RESULTS AT SMALL & MEDIUM ENTERPRISES**

# Project Factsheet

Acronym:	Gear-at-SME
Title:	Generate energy efficient acting and results at small & medium enterprises
Coordinator:	Nederlandse Organisatie voor Toegepast-Natuurwetenschappelijk Onderzoek (TNO)
Reference:	894356
Type:	Coordination and Support Action
Program:	Horizon 2020
Call:	H2020-LC-SC3-2018-2019-2020
Start:	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2020
Duration:	32 months (after approved extension with 2 months)
Website:	<a href="http://gearatsme.eu">gearatsme.eu</a>
Consortium:	Nederlandse Organisatie voor Toegepast-Natuurwetenschappelijk Onderzoek (TNO) CIT Industriell Energi AB (CIT) CertiMaC Soc. Cons. a R. L. (CERTIMAC) Berlin Energy Agency (BEA) Servelect (SVT) Cornelissen Consulting Services B.V. (CCS) SYNYO GmbH (SYNYO) Technical University of Cluj-Napoca (TUCN) Confederazione Nazionale Dell'Artigianato e Della Piccola e Media Impresa Associazione Territoriale Di Ravenna (CNA) Stichting CLOK (CLOK)

## Deliverable factsheet

Number:	D6.2
Title:	Adjusted methodology – Guidelines for implementing the revised GEAR@SME methodology
Lead beneficiary	CIT
Work package:	6
Task:	6.3
Dissemination level:	Public
Submission date:	31.01.2023
Contributors:	TNO: Julie Cammell (review: Karina Veum) CIT: Ingrid Nyström, Jessica Johansson BEA: (review: Palmira Ugarte Berzal)

### Document history:

Revision	Date	Main modification	Author
0	19/01/2023	Original version	Ingrid Nyström, Julie Camell, Jessica Johansson
1	31/01/2023	Review	Karina Veum, Palmira, Ugarte Berzal

## Disclaimer of warranties

*"This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020, research and innovation programme, under Grant Agreement No 894356"*

This document has been prepared by Gear@SME project partners as an account of work carried out within the framework of the EC-GA contract no 894356.

Neither Project Coordinator, nor any signatory party of Gear@SME Project Consortium Agreement, nor any person acting on behalf of any of them:

- makes any warranty or representation whatsoever, express or implied,
- with respect to the use of any information, apparatus, method, process, or similar item disclosed in this document, including merchantability and fitness for a particular purpose, or
- that such use does not infringe on or interfere with privately owned rights, including any party's intellectual property, or
- that this document is suitable to any particular user's circumstance; or
- assumes responsibility for any damages or other liability whatsoever (including any consequential damages, even if Project Coordinator or any representative of a signatory party of the Gear@SME Project Consortium Agreement, has been advised of the possibility of such damages) resulting from your selection or use of this document or any information, apparatus, method, process, or similar item disclosed in this document.

# Table of contents

Project Factsheet .....	2
Deliverable factsheet.....	3
Disclaimer of warranties .....	4
Table of contents .....	5
About these guidelines .....	6
Introduction .....	8
A collective approach – the concepts .....	8
Benefits of a collective approach.....	10
Multiple benefits of energy savings .....	11
A: Promote and facilitate the collective approach.....	12
Develop and finance an initiative .....	12
Multiply collectives.....	13
Provide long-term support .....	13
B: Define scope and organize stakeholders.....	15
B.1 Forming an Energy Working Group.....	16
B.2 Setting your ambition .....	17
B.3 Defining services and activities .....	18
B.4 Motivating SMEs to participate .....	19
B.5 Involving the right stakeholders .....	21
B.6 Developing the organizational structure .....	22
C: Create activities for the SMEs in the collective .....	23
C.1 Create continuous motivation of SMEs.....	23
C.2 Support SMEs in their needs.....	25
D: Monitor and follow up on results .....	30
E: Identified areas in which SMEs may need support.....	33
APPENDIX: Approach to revising the methodology.....	36

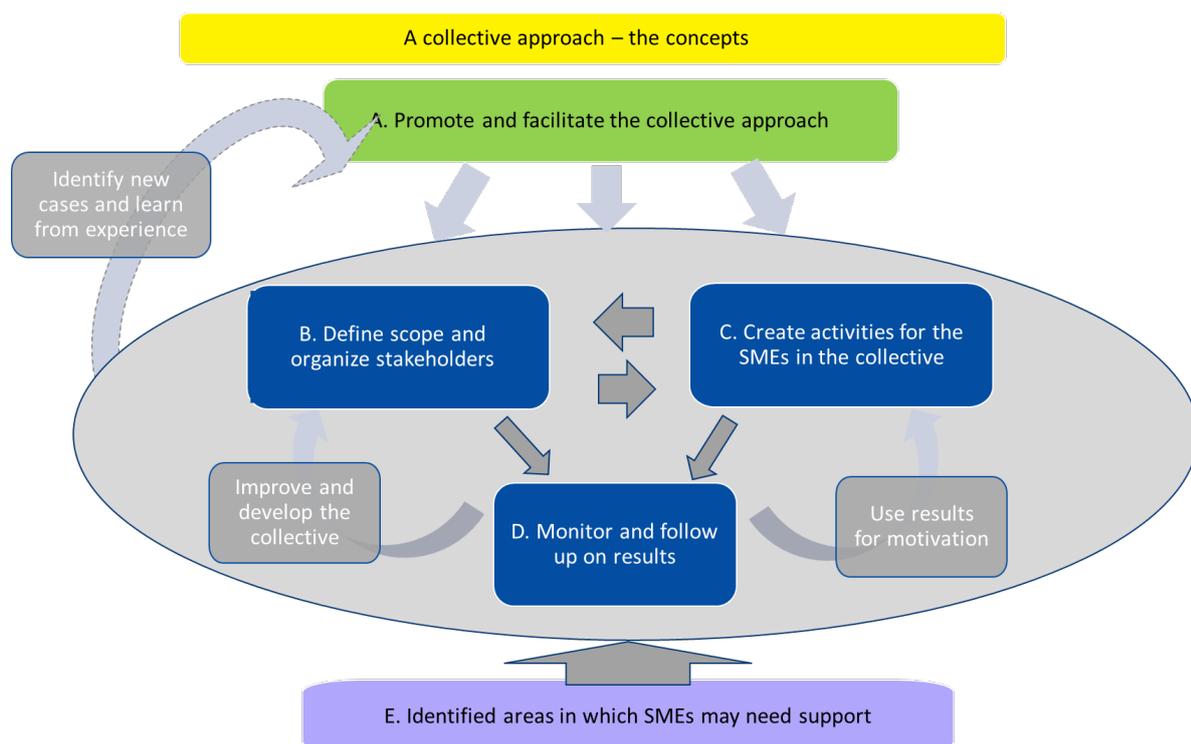
## About these guidelines

The GEAR@SME methodology has previously been described in a handbook ([see Further reading, below](#)). Based on the experiences gained through the implementation of the four use cases (in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Romania) of the GEAR@SME project, needs for revisions and clarifications have been identified. The process of collecting these experiences and the main findings from the process are described in the Appendix, together with a summary of the adjustments made.

This report provides thus guidelines for implementing the revised GEAR@SME methodology, which document the revisions at the same time as they serve as a summary of the handbook. The guidelines describe how to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) located in a geographical cluster (i.e. a local industrial area, a business park or the SMEs in a municipality), to improve the sustainability of their businesses by implementing energy efficiency and renewable energy measures. The guidelines explain useful steps and activities for coordinating a collective approach to providing this support. They have been developed primarily for supporting organizations (the Multiplier Organization) and for coordinators (the Trusted Partner) but are also useful for other collaborative partners, such as energy service suppliers.

These guidelines have been developed as part of the Horizon 2020 funded GEAR@SME Project, which aims to address the untapped potential of energy efficiency in SMEs by supporting Trusted Partners to bridge the gap between SMEs and energy service suppliers.

The different aspects included in the guidelines, and their respective target groups, are described by the figure and table, below. For more detail on the different steps of these aspects, the handbook is still a valid source.





## Further reading

The aspects included in these guidelines are described in more detail in the [complete handbook](#), available for download from the [Explore](#) section of the [energy efficient sme portal](#) ([www.energyefficientsme.se](http://www.energyefficientsme.se)). The handbook also includes a full list of references used to develop the methodology and details all contributors to the development.

In addition, the portal includes [training materials](#) on the methodology, multiple benefits and the implementation of collective projects; [tools](#) supporting the implementation of energy scans and other energy management stages; [best practices](#) on technologies for improving energy efficiency in SMEs; and [inspirational stories](#). There, also concise factsheets focusing on specific topics covered in these guidelines can be found.

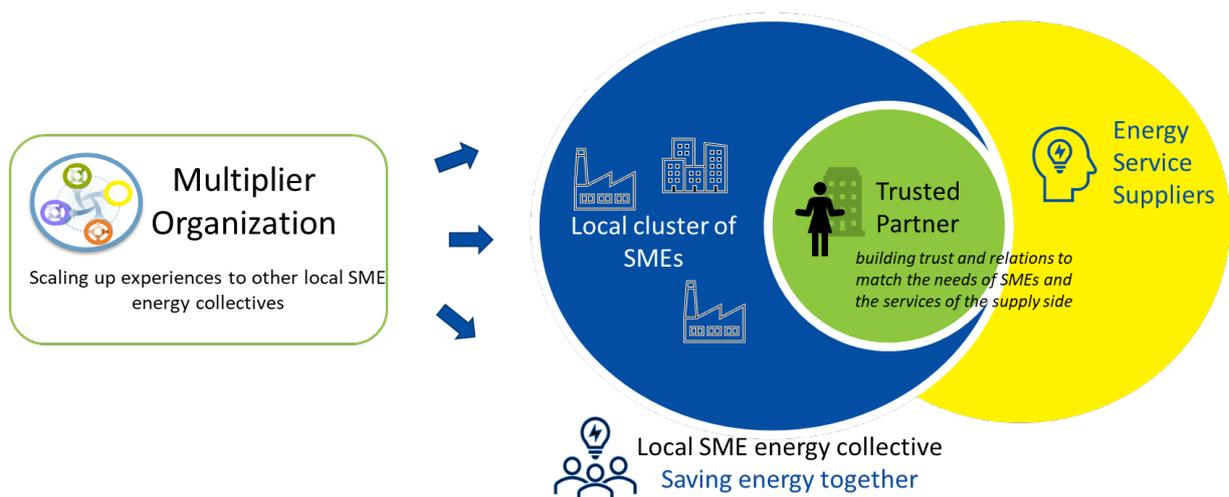
## Introduction

In this chapter, you will be introduced to the concepts of a collective approach and its benefits. A short description of multiple benefits for an SME from investing in energy efficiency or renewable energy is also included.

### A collective approach – the concepts

The GEAR@SME project proposes a collective approach to supporting SMEs that are co-located in a geographical cluster, to improve the sustainability of their businesses by undertaking energy efficiency and renewable energy measures. **A collective approach means that a coordinating entity organises the SMEs in a local industrial area, a business park, a municipality, or another geographically defined area, into a group in order to reap the benefits of collective action, such as increased motivation, mutual learning, and mutual interests.**

Below, the key actors for whom these guidelines have been developed are defined. Their respective roles and relations are illustrated by the figure below.



**Local cluster of SMEs** is the group of SMEs that are brought together and supported by the Trusted Partner. The cluster could be from a local industrial area, a business park, the SMEs in a municipality, or any other geographically defined area.

**Trusted Partner** is the organization or individual that drives the development of the collective activities and supports the SMEs to improve the sustainability of their businesses by undertaking energy efficiency and renewable energy measures. The Trusted Partner should have a strong existing connection to the cluster of SMEs and already be trusted by these SMEs, or actively be striving for developing such connections and trust. While these two requirements are key, it also helps to be a neutral actor and to have a broad network of supporting stakeholders. The Trusted Partner could be, for instance, a business park manager, an independent local foundation for entrepreneurs, an association of SMEs, or a municipality.

**Energy Service Suppliers** can be energy consultants, energy auditors, ESCOs, grid operators and technology suppliers, which provide energy expertise and services to the local SME energy collective. Their experience and knowledge are important for developing efficient and cost-effective solutions for the SMEs. The Trusted Partner acts as a bridge between SMEs and energy service suppliers. Further, it is generally also highly relevant to develop the collective's network of other supportive stakeholders, such as industry organizations, energy advisors, municipalities, or funding agencies.

**Local SME energy collective** is formed when the cluster of SMEs, or a sub-group of the SMEs in the cluster, together address the challenges of adopting energy efficiency and renewable energy measures, with the support of a Trusted Partner. It can range from a more loosely knit collective, focusing on knowledge sharing and networking activities, to a more formal long-term organization, providing membership benefits and engaging in common collective energy projects.

**Multiplier Organizations** play an important role in the establishment, scale-up and long-term support of local SME energy collectives by identifying and supporting suitable SME clusters and Trusted Partners. They are, in general, non-profit organizations with a purpose and potential to support SMEs in becoming more economically viable and/or to foster sustainability on the regional or national level. Examples are federations for industrial business parks, chambers of commerce, branch or SME associations, and public authorities such as regional/national energy agencies or universities or other research institutes.

### **Examples of a collective approach**

A collective approach can be implemented in different ways, for example:

- An energy collective started by a group of SMEs, with one or more SMEs becoming the Trusted Partner, for example, for SMEs co-located in an industrial park.
- An energy advisor bringing together SMEs in a local area to take common action to reduce the local power peaks.
- A business park manager or similar role acting as a trusted partner and supporting the roll-out of energy audits, networking and other enabling activities (see for instance the Dutch use case Platform Ondernemend Meierijstad and the Romanian use case Oradea Industrial Platforms).
- A multiplier organisation, such as a municipality, chamber of commerce or SME association, taking on the role of trusted partner and coordinating energy saving activities amongst a group of SMEs (see for instance the Italian use case Roveri industrial area).
- A cluster of SMEs which form a renewable energy community (REC) to invest in solar PV and share energy, and thereby start forming a collaborative energy network.

More information about the GEAR@SME use cases and other inspirational stories can be found at [www.energyefficientsme.eu](http://www.energyefficientsme.eu).

## Benefits of a collective approach

When taking part in a collective approach, SMEs benefit from increased motivation, mutual learning and synergies between them. Research and experience from previous initiatives in several countries show that approaches involving collective elements, such as energy efficiency networks or sustainable business parks, add various benefits, for example a significantly increased implementation rate of energy measures.

The table below offers examples of potential benefits from using a collective approach towards energy efficiency in SMEs. These effects have been verified through research and experience in several countries (for references, see the complete Handbook).

Benefits from a collective approach	
Significantly increase implementation rate of measures	SMEs that participate in, for example, energy networking programs implement a larger share of the energy efficiency improvements identified in an audit compared to those taking part in individual energy audit programs.
Reduce barriers to energy efficiency	Barriers to energy efficiency that many SMEs are facing, for instance lack of time, resources and knowledge, can efficiently be addressed.
Provide linkage to Energy Service Suppliers	SMEs can, as a group, receive help to connect to appropriate energy experts and technology providers based on the SMEs' needs, thereby facilitating knowledge transfer as well as actual implementation.
Increase use of energy management practices	Help SMEs to adopt energy management practices that have proven to be important factors for realizing energy efficiency improvements. Examples of such success factors include long-term energy strategies, concrete energy targets, and clear responsibilities.
Provide a basis for collective energy measures	A collective approach is necessary for efficiently implementing collective energy measures, such as local heat grids or common solar panels in a business park.
Increase cost efficiency	A collective offer can be more cost-efficient from the perspective of Energy Service Suppliers (and for the SMEs). SMEs are many and small, and it might not be worth-while to offer individual services from the perspective of an ESS, while a joint offer to several SMEs can be a good project for the supply companies.
Facilitate access to financing	Financing institutes and banks may be more willing to provide financing for e.g. collective purchases, since the activities of an individual SME may often be too small to generate interest.
Lead to benefits beyond energy efficiency	Examples include improved company image, establishment of new contacts and business relations (e.g. SMEs may find new customer relationships through the collective).

## Multiple benefits of energy savings

For SMEs, increased awareness about energy use and improvements in energy efficiency will lead to a reduction in energy use and energy expenditure. On top of that, there may also be benefits connected to, for instance, the working conditions within the SME or the value proposition of the SME in relation to its products/services. These are so-called multiple benefits (sometimes also referred to as non-energy benefits, co-benefits, or ancillary benefits). Identifying and quantifying multiple benefits clarifies for decision makers within an SME how investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy are linked to the core business of a company, and thus contribute to competitive advantage.

Below are some examples of potential multiple benefits for an SME from investing in energy efficiency or renewable energy.

Multiple benefits of energy efficiency for the SMEs	
Energy cost savings	Decreased energy costs are a direct effect of implementing measures that improve energy efficiency.
Higher productivity and less maintenance	Adoption of new, more energy efficient technologies often brings benefits in terms of overall productivity and fewer breaks in production due to maintenance.
Improved competitiveness, robustness and independency	Higher productivity and reduced operational costs improve overall competitiveness and reduce the sensitivity to variable energy prices.
Improved working environment	Better ventilation, lighting and routines may improve the working environment and employee safety as new energy-efficient technologies are often cleaner and quieter.
Reduced environmental impact and increased sustainability	Many companies have internal environmental and sustainability goals, requirements from regulators and/or from customers. Energy efficiency helps <a href="#">to</a> reach these goals and requirements. The market demands for such goals are also expected to increase.

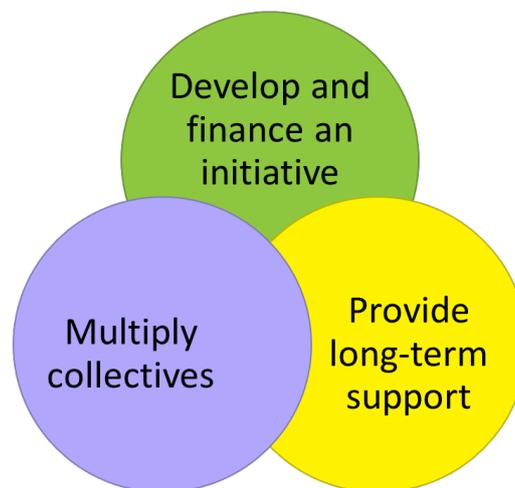
## Further reading

The Implement section of the online portal contains [training materials](#) on how to implement a collective approach for a cluster of SMEs and the concept of multiple benefits (the training programs *Establishing Energy Collectives* and *Multiple Benefits*).

More information about multiple benefits can also be found on the webpages of other projects, such as the MBenefits project ([www.mbenefits.eu](http://www.mbenefits.eu)) and the DEESME project ([www.deesme.eu](http://www.deesme.eu)).

## A: Promote and facilitate the collective approach

In this chapter, you will find guidance on how to multiply the development of SME clusters into local SME energy collectives, by identifying relevant SME clusters and Trusted Partners who provide long term support for local SME collectives. The process has been divided into three different interrelated, and partly overlapping, parts (see figure below). This chapter is primarily relevant for you if you have a role in a Multiplier Organization.



### Develop and finance an initiative

As a Multiplier Organization, it is expected that 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 to reduce the contribution of SMEs to the generation of greenhouse gas emissions leading. 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.

To function as a Multiplier Organization you need to develop a plan or program for [how to contribute to the development of local SME energy collectives](#) as part of this ambition. This means that you will need to 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 level and type of support you will be able to offer to the Trusted Partners and to the collectives formed, either directly or by securing collaboration with other stakeholders. Experience shows that Trusted Partners will need support in relation to all development steps described in Sections B and C.
- The human resources and competences your organization will be able to put into these efforts. In addition to communicative and training skills, competence in the areas of energy efficiency and sustainability will increase the chances of success.

- The financial resources you will need to implement the plan/programme, and secure these from either internal resources and/or external funding, noting that financing may also be needed to strengthen the resources of the Trusted Partners.

In the development of this plan, the national and regional barriers and opportunities in terms of sector targets, legislation (e.g. the framework for energy communities), funding opportunities (including if collectives or local consortia are eligible for funding) and financial incentives for SMEs need to be taken into account.

## Multiply collectives

To support the multiplication of local SME energy collectives, relevant SME clusters and Trusted Partners need to be identified and motivated. This process can be summarized in three steps:

- Firstly, the potential of existing SME clusters and networks is evaluated. For local SME clusters of varying sizes, you want to get insight into their current “level of collectiveness” and organization.
- Secondly, potential Trusted Partners for these networks are identified. Their potential and interest in further developing this role by supporting the cluster in strengthening the focus on energy and sustainability are assessed. The two key functions of the Trusted Partner are to already have a strong connection to the SME cluster and to be trusted by these SMEs. Additional qualifiers, such as organizational and energy expertise, can strengthen the role. Finally, the Trusted Partner needs to have – or can gain access to – sufficient resources to be a coordinator.
- Thirdly, potential external barriers and opportunities for the initiative are identified that may impact the potential for developing a cluster. These include more specific local or sector targets, as well as legal and funding conditions.

The aim is to motivate and support a Trusted Partner to engage in developing a local SME energy collective. Therefore, the process should be based on an interactive and open dialogue in order to also identify the [benefits for the Trusted Partner](#).

## Provide long-term support

In accordance with the plan developed, the Multiplier Organization should provide and channel support to the Trusted Partners and the SME clusters until they are established and can function more independently. The support needed depends on the Trusted Partners’ specific background and situation but relates to all aspects of organizing and running an energy collective; enabling support in relation to energy and sustainability; and the availability of the right people with whom to continuously discuss plans, activities and hurdles. The independence and ongoing success of Trusted Partners in involving the right stakeholders and developing their network relies, at least in part, on the fostering of these skills by the Multiplier Organization.

In addition, to direct interaction with the Trusted Partners, support can be provided via [handbooks and websites](#), by [training and seminars](#) for Trusted Partners, [communication efforts](#), and [platforms](#) for the exchange of experiences with their peers. These types of support materials have been developed in the GEAR@SME project (see below), but there may also be relevant national and regional sources of information. Last, but not least, the Trusted Partner often needs [financial support](#) 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.

## Further reading

The [Explore](#) section of the portal provides more details on how to promote and facilitate the collective approach under Section A (see also downloads). At the portal [Interact](#) section are also online communities set up for the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Romania and Austria, and at a common EU level, where Trusted Partners and other stakeholders can register to interact with experts and peers. Further, the [training materials](#) *Saving Energy Together: Why and Energy Collectives: Getting started* are relevant to visit.

## B: Define scope and organize stakeholders

In this section, you will find a six-step guide on how to define the scope when working with a specific SME cluster regarding overall objectives, activities and services to offer, how to motivate the SMEs to participate, and organising the stakeholders. The six-step process is summarized in the figure below. In many cases, the steps will be developed partly in parallel and through an [iterative process](#). It is primarily relevant for you if you have the role of a Trusted Partner. You will find support for getting started with a collective approach or developing those aspects that you find especially challenging.

### B.1 Forming an Energy Working Group

You form a core group of persons who can support you in the development of the collective. The group could consist of representatives from SME frontrunners, energy associations, or other enthusiastic stakeholders.

### B.2 Setting your ambition

You set and formulate the ambition and focus of your local energy collective - together with your Energy Working Group - and with the needs and priorities of the SME cluster in mind. The ambition level can vary widely between collectives.

### B.3 Defining services and activities

You tailor the services and activities of the collective to the needs of the SMEs. The focus varies between collectives and will develop as the energy maturity of your SMEs grows. The offer is summarized in a value proposition.

### B.4 Motivating SMEs to participate

You get to know the SMEs and highlight how the services and activities offered answer the specific challenges and business values of the individual SMEs that you contact. Ask questions and go back and adapt your offer if needed.

### B.5 Involving the right stakeholders

You identify and mobilize relevant stakeholders, such as Energy Service Suppliers or public organizations that may play a role in the local energy collective and develop your network. The network stakeholders may be more or less involved, and in different roles.

### B.6 Developing the organizational structure

You develop a long-term structure for the organization, ownership, membership and revenue flows of your collective. For less mature energy collectives, free participation for the SMEs might be preferable - as the collective evolves so does the organizational structure into more formal commitments.

To give an overview of the process, two examples of outcomes for each of the six steps are briefly summarized in the table below. Alternative outcomes are provided by the use cases, which also show concrete examples in line with the ones described below.

	Example A	Example B
Energy Working Group	Trusted Partner with representatives from active SMEs.	Trusted Partner with the municipality’s energy advisor.
Impact Ambition	Achieving a sustainable business park – zero climate impact.	Motivate SMEs to start thinking about energy.
Value proposition	Focus on collective energy projects.	Focus on offering free energy scans and free energy workshops.
Approach towards motivating SMEs	Kick-start a well-prepared first project to let its success motivate further actions.	Focus on the needs of individual SMEs and target multiple benefits of energy efficiency.
Network development	Detailed stakeholder analysis and long-term agreements with key Energy Service Suppliers.	Energy experts from Multiplier Organization engaged to lead the workshops.
Organization structure and revenues	A formalized long-term organization where SMEs are partners.	All activities included in Trusted Partners current role and funding.

### B.1 Forming an Energy Working Group

For a Trusted Partner to be able to develop a collective approach in a cluster of SMEs, it will be important to have a core group of persons for support. The group could consist, for example, of representatives from SME frontrunners, energy associations, and/or other enthusiastic or strategic stakeholders. When identifying the potential members, it is useful to make a list of stakeholders and to plot them in a circle diagram (see the figure below). Here, the stakeholders that you know best, collaborate most closely with, and estimate to have a high level of engagement are put closer to the central circle, and the others are placed further out.



From this overview, you select which stakeholders to invite to your Energy Working Group. The most important criteria are that they are enthusiastic and that you think they would be willing to work on developing the collective with you. Ideally, these team members also have complementary skills and knowledge, e.g. a broader network, knowledge of a specific sector, or knowledge of SMEs.

## B.2 Setting your ambition

Together with your Energy Working Group, you can then formulate an overall ambition and/or focus of your local energy collective, with the needs and priorities of the SME cluster in mind. The ambition can be about creating a sustainable business park, achieving net-zero climate impact, increasing energy efficiency, or reaching a specific number or value of energy measures. Collectives with a clear impact ambition are more successful, since they are able to select activities that directly contribute to the goal they aim to achieve.

The figure below shows the impact ambition development tool, consisting of seven questions. The answers to these seven questions together form your impact ambition. Once your impact ambition is well defined, you can use it as a starting point for developing more specific objectives, which then can be used to follow up on the results of your work.

What?	•Our intended outcome is ...
How?	•We aim to reach our intended outcome by ...
For whom?	•Our target group is ...
Where?	•Our invention area is ...
How many?	•Size of the target group aimed for ...
By Whom?	•The leading organizations are ...
When?	•The time to reach the desired outcome is ...
Why?	•The social change we contribute to is ...

## B.3 Defining services and activities

The impact ambition is mostly formulated in general terms. Therefore, it is helpful to clearly define the services and activities that should be in focus and tailor them to the needs of the SMEs (see also section B.4 below on motivating SMEs). The offer can be summarized in a value proposition, which should convince SMEs of the added benefit of participating in the collective – that they are better off with the services and activities of the collective than without. It is thus important for the motivation of the SMEs.

The goal is to select activities and services that address both SMEs' motivation to participate and help them overcome their challenges. These activities differ in complexity and impact on SMEs – from setting up networking events and arranging energy audits, to setting up an ESCO (Energy Service Company) that takes over the entire energy management of a group of SMEs.

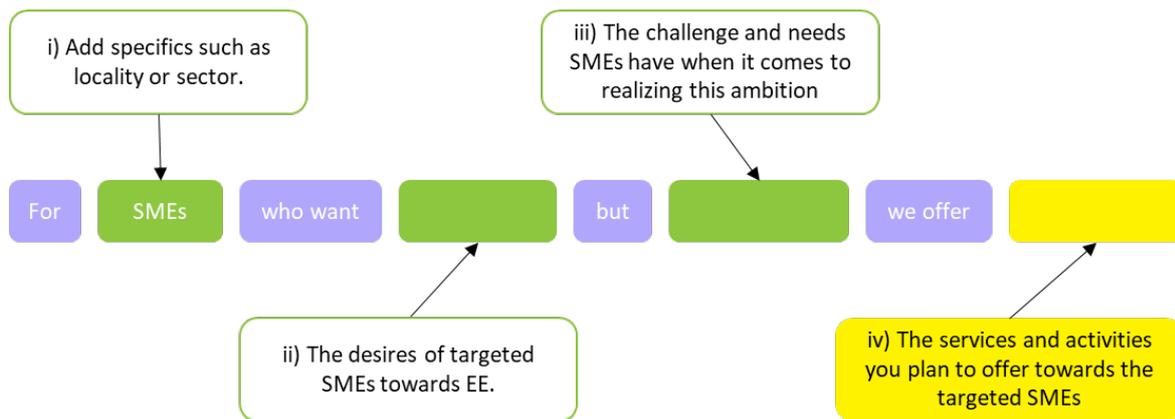
To select and frame the services that your local energy collective should focus on, you want to identify both the needs and challenges the SMEs in this specific cluster encounter (as a group).

Examples of challenges SMEs could encounter are the lack of:

- Awareness of benefits of energy efficiency measures.
- Access to finance to implement measures.
- Knowledge on which energy suppliers to turn to.
- Time and resources to focus on energy related issues.
- Connection to other SMEs for collective projects.

To identify these challenges, you can interview or have informal talks with some of the SMEs regarding their experiences and beliefs on these topics. In these meetings, you should focus on discovering what (i) their level of maturity and interest is regarding energy efficiency measures, and (ii) what their biggest challenges are or could become regarding implementing energy efficiency measures.

A good value proposition can be summarized in one sentence, as shown in the figure below. For SMEs who want [... *something related to EE* ...] but [... *face a challenge* ...], we offer [... *services and activities* ...]. You can formulate multiple value propositions for one local SME energy collective, e.g. if you want to target multiple groups of SMEs with different services and activities.



When developing a value proposition, use your creativity, knowledge and business sense of what might work in the local context you are familiar with. Possibly some iterations and feedback rounds within your group are required before you come up with a relevant value proposition. The continuous development of relevant services and activities within the collective is further discussed in section C.1.

## B.4 Motivating SMEs to participate

To motivate the SMEs, it is necessary to understand how the services and activities initially formulated in the value proposition correspond to the specific challenges and business values of the *individual* SMEs that you contact. Be prepared to add details on what they get and what is expected from them. Ask questions and go back and adapt your offer in the value proposition if needed.

To find out what would motivate the individual SME to participate **often takes more time than you expect**. Earlier initiatives have shown this to be the most challenging part of all. One piece of advice is to start with the companies you think would be most interested. Once a small group is gathered, motivating additional companies will be easier. Good examples of how other SMEs have acted can have greater influence on environmentally friendly behaviour than simply providing information.

**To motivate** SMEs to participate in the activities of the local energy collective, **one-on-one contacts will be needed**. Further, this is an **iterative process** – communication will be enhanced by each contact you have with SMEs. A successful motivational strategy may be to offer a specific activity to the SMEs early, such as a seminar on energy management or regulatory aspects or preparations for energy scans. The figure below shows the main steps of the process of involving SMEs in the local energy collective.



### Collect your offer and arguments

Base the messages you would like to communicate on the offer in the value proposition for the local SME energy collective and on the main general arguments for joining. Examples of such arguments are linked to:

- potential multiple benefits for the SMEs from saving energy, including reduced energy costs and contribution to climate mitigation, and
- additional benefits from doing this with a collective approach, including, for example, that the SMEs can support and learn from each other, and may benefit from collective energy projects.

### Adapt to the SME needs

When contacting the company directly, your primary aims are to [communicate the offer](#) and arguments for participating and to [learn more about the company](#). It may be necessary to [highlight the most relevant parts of the offer for each company](#) and adapt the general arguments. Tailored information usually encourages behaviour change more effectively than general information. To tailor the information to a specific SME, it is useful to make an overview of as many basic “facts and figures” (business segment, company size, energy use) as possible and complement this with information about energy maturity and values and drivers that you pick up through your contacts. Use what you already know, collect information that is available on the company’s website, and ask questions through your contacts with the company. [Start with a few companies, and with some information, and develop the group and your knowledge gradually.](#)

### Identify relevant contacts and communicate your offer

Relevant persons to contact may be decision makers, persons that need the support of an energy collective, and persons that can contribute with company information.

The purpose of taking contact is to build trust and create motivation. Adapt your information, [ask questions](#) to find out more about the specific SME and give them possibility to ask questions about the initiative. Strive to end all conversations with an agreement regarding the steps to follow and how to continue your dialogue. At a later

stage in the process, it might be relevant to make commitments between you and the SME. Formal commitments can give a stronger base for collaboration. However, if, for instance, SMEs are unwilling to sign commitments, they may also form a barrier.

### B.5 Involving the right stakeholders

The coordination of the energy collective will be made easier with the involvement of relevant stakeholders, such as industry organizations, energy advisors, municipalities, funding agencies and Energy Service Suppliers, that may contribute with different type of resources and to developing your network. The network stakeholders may be more or less involved and have different roles. Which stakeholders you should try to involve depends on the needs you see and the resources you and others have access to. An early involvement of e.g. decision makers and funding agencies can be especially important if investments in collective projects are planned.

#### Identifying the needs and resources

First, you want to have a clear view on what resources are required to fulfill the impact ambition and value proposition of the local SME energy collective. One way to get an overview of your internal resources and required external resources is to use the Value Creation Canvas (see the figure below). The canvas simultaneously captures the activities and the connected resources that you have or that your partners should have.



Experiences of other local SME energy collectives show that they operate best if they have access to resources, such as: innovative and technical knowledge; leadership, strategic and organizing capabilities; collaborative and mediating capabilities; financial resources; and support from local governmental agencies.

#### Developing the stakeholder network

Based on the needs identified and the resources that are already available, the stakeholder group involved should then be developed to complement those resources. By understanding the interests, resources, and influence of your network, you can

identify which parties are most important to involve. You might also want to think about the timing: who do you need now, and who can be involved later for specific activities.

An important stakeholder group to include are Energy Service Suppliers that can support the SMEs with energy efficiency measures. Strive to match the Energy Service Suppliers involved with the needs of the SMEs and to the actual services to be offered.

Start approaching the potential partners that are already enthusiastic and have high influence on others and try to identify additional benefits for the stakeholders to engage in the collective. For example, motivational aspects for Energy Service Suppliers could be benefits of scale due to the collective approach (many small customers included at the same time) and increasing their network with other entrepreneurs.

### **Formalizing the collaboration**

Once you have all the required stakeholders on board, you will want to discuss roles and responsibilities together. There are multiple options – at different formality levels - to ensure commitment from all stakeholders.

Creating a legal structure requires a significant investment in time and money, but such an entity has the advantage of being able to sign contracts for assignments, subsidies, and projects directly. If this is not needed, signing a collaboration agreement is a less formal way of ensuring the commitment of all partners.

## **B.6 Developing the organizational structure**

Longer-term, if the collective requires and/or starts generating more resources, it may be relevant to develop a more formal structure for the organization, ownership, membership and revenue flows of your collective.

A common method to organize the SMEs in your collective is to work with a membership structure, where each member pays a membership fee. Determining the revenues from SMEs is also dependent on other potential revenues (such as subsidies and grants) as well as the cost structure of your organization. For some collectives, free participation for the SMEs might be preferable. However, past experiences show that a good way to make a collective grow and be successful is to have SMEs actively contributing both financially and in-kind to a collective.

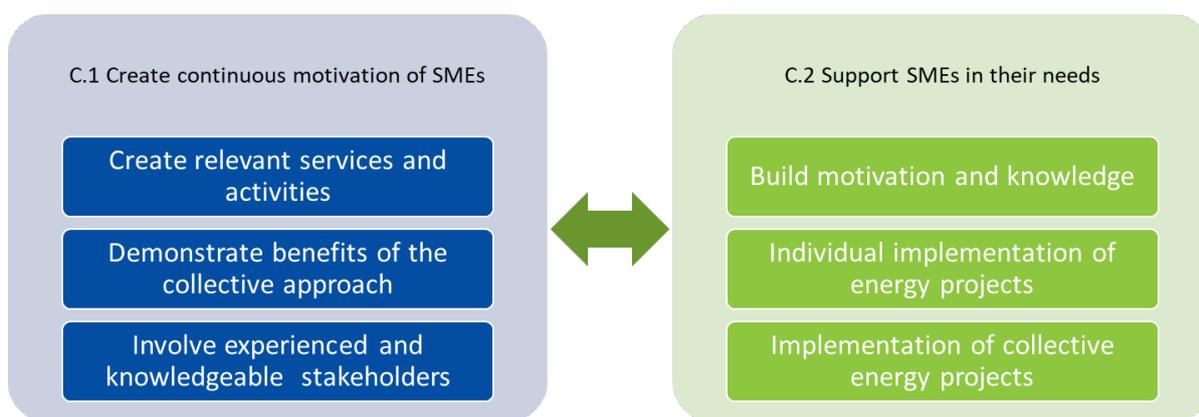
The chosen legal form will play a central role in the implementation of the activities and is the point of contact for the SMEs and for (external) financiers.

### **Further reading**

The [Explore](#) section of the portal provides more details and downloads on how to define the scope of a local SME energy collective and organize stakeholders under Section B. Further, there is a set of [training materials](#) including an introduction (*Saving Energy Together: Why*), the first steps of development (*Energy Collectives: Getting started*) and to continue the development (*Energy Collectives: Defining activities* and *Energy Collectives Continuity*).

## C: Create activities for the SMEs in the collective

In this section, you will find guidance on how to develop and carry out the actual activities of the local SME energy collective. It is primarily relevant for you if you have the role of a Trusted Partner. It includes practical advice on how to motivate SMEs to continuously be involved in the collective as well as examples of relevant activities and methodologies for supporting SMEs in their needs (see figure below). The areas in which SMEs may need support are listed and described in section E, which can further support the development of activities, if needed.



### C.1 Create continuous motivation of SMEs

You support the SMEs to maintain the motivation for continuous and active participation in the activities and services offered, thereby taking steps towards implementation of energy measures. There are three key motivational approaches: (1) create services and activities that are *relevant* to the SME, (2) utilize the collective approach, and (3) involve the right expertise.

#### Create relevant services and activities

It is important that the services and activities that are offered to the SMEs match their continuously changing needs and interests. The activities can be tailored to address the ambitions and business targets of the SMEs as well as support them in their energy saving strategies. Although your services and activities are energy-related, the ambitions and targets of the SMEs will often be related to their core business and other non-energy topics. Even if the values and drivers of SMEs vary and often include aspects such as environmental consciousness, or to be a force of innovation, it is useful to keep in mind that the main motivational driver is often economic. This means that high or increasing energy prices in general can be found to be an especially high motivating factor. Explaining and showing examples of the multiple benefits of the energy-related services can motivate SMEs further.

The best way to gain insights into the ambitions and targets of individual SMEs is by [personal interaction](#) with the companies, and by continuously developing your knowledge about the SMEs involved. This requires a dialogue between you and each

company. This continuous dialogue and development may also lead to revisions of the overall value proposition of the collective (see section B.3).

Examples of the types of services and activities that may be offered to the SMEs in the cluster are described in the table below.

Services and activities	Examples
Regular networking events	Organized meetings as a collective encourage the exchange of experiences with regards to the activities of SMEs in the collective (e.g. energy scans and measures, monitoring or collective projects).
	Workshops and seminars to build SME skills and knowledge – in the same areas where you provide individual support or plan collective projects, and with support from your network.
	Study visits to participating SMEs – to strengthen and concretize the exchange of experience.
Communication on energy achievements to SME collective	Regular updates via newsletters, website, group emails, direct contacts and meetings, etc.
	Present good examples from SMEs in the local cluster (or elsewhere).
	Communicate success and celebrate achievements.
Coordinated support to individual SMEs for identification and implementation of energy efficiency measures	Energy scans and energy audits, to identify energy efficiency potentials and their associated (multiple) benefits.
	Support for different steps in selecting, planning and implementing measures.
	Support the development of an SME's business case of energy measures, for securing internal and/or external financing,
	Support for applying for public funding for audits and measures.
Collective energy projects	Planning and organization of collective energy projects.
	Support the development of the business case of the collective energy project, for securing financing
	Collective purchases of energy audits/energy scans or energy efficient equipment.
	Collective energy measures, e.g. common solar panels, heat exchanges between companies etc.
External communication – to broader network and wider	Communicate achievements via, for instance, website, local news channels, the local municipality, and directly to your network.
Other activities to strengthen the collective	Setting collective targets together with the SMEs, and regularly tracking progress towards these targets.

### Demonstrate benefits of the collective approach

Working together with others can have many inspiring advantages that you as a Trusted Partner can reinforce and make visible.

One motivational aspect of working together is that the companies can find **support and learn from each other**. Some companies might, for instance, be frontrunners willing to demonstrate their energy strategy and measures. Another strong benefit of

the collective approach that will increase motivation is that the [implementation of collective projects](#) can increase both cost efficiency and sustainability compared to individual actions. One motivating strategy may therefore be to, at an early stage, identify a concrete project that has the potential to quickly show results and develop the collective from that. One example can be to collectively invest in solar PV installations.

And, finally, an important aspect when working together is also to strengthen the [sense of belonging in the local SME energy collective](#). To do that:

- Set targets for the energy collective together
- Perform regular follow-ups on results
- Celebrate and communicate success, and
- Spread the news externally

Further, to utilize the motivational aspects of collaborative activities, make sure to involve the participants actively in both planning and implementation of activities, such as network meetings and events.

### **Involve experienced and knowledgeable stakeholders**

All stakeholders involved in the local SME energy collective contribute with knowledge, expertise, and skills. The interest of SMEs can be encouraged by [involving the partners in activities](#) and encouraging them to contribute to the local SME energy collective. Stakeholders with high interest in the SMEs and the energy collective can provide an especially enthusiastic level of support. The stakeholders can, for instance, share their knowledge and experience in meetings, seminars and workshops.

## **C.2 Support SMEs in their needs**

Carrying out actual activities for supporting SMEs are, of course, *the core part* of running a local SME energy collective. You support the SMEs in their various needs related to energy efficiency, energy management and implementation of energy projects by offering relevant activities targeted at those needs.

### **Build motivation and knowledge**

Many of the activities that are carried out in a collective approach aim, at least partly, to build motivation and increase the knowledge about energy efficiency in SMEs. SMEs have a need for both increased motivation and for support to integrate energy efficiency in the day-to-day business of the SMEs.

Activities you can undertake to support the SMEs with these needs can be [regular networking events such as organized meetings, training seminars and workshops, and study visits](#). Especially when it comes to knowledge building and increased adoption of energy management practices, sharing experiences and good examples with other companies has been shown to be a successful approach. You can strengthen knowledge building by providing follow-up material and information after the events and visits, and through your recurring communication with the SMEs between events.

Also, experience shows that an essential part of building motivation and knowledge is to carry out energy scans. Quick scans give a first insight and can work as a conversation starter. Scans done by professionals (e.g. energy consultants) create trusted results by including preliminary energy saving measures and can be part of a more detailed analysis needed for investment decisions.

### Support individual implementation of energy projects

A key part of running an energy collective is to provide support to the individual SMEs who want to improve their energy efficiency. This support is mostly provided by Energy Service Suppliers or other stakeholders included in the network, while the Trusted Partner is there as a connecting link. By coordinating activities related to these steps amongst several SMEs, you and the local SME energy collective can save time and resources. The following table can provide guidance on steps included.

Step	SME needs	Support options
<b>A. Assessment of potential energy savings and measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimation of energy consumption and impact</li> <li>• Identification of potential solutions to reduce consumption</li> <li>• Investigation of other potential benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support SMEs in conducting a basic energy scan, or recommend the use of an auditor for a more detailed audit</li> <li>• Providing information on best practices</li> <li>• Support SMEs to evaluate and decide on viable energy saving measures by providing tools and/or templates, or through collective discussion in a workshop with other SMEs</li> </ul>
<b>B. Creation of an energy action plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of energy efficiency projects</li> <li>• Search for public support and funding</li> <li>• Search for financing options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide access to templates and guidance, including checklists for company management and calculation tools</li> <li>• Provide other support for developing basic business cases; guidance on finding financing options, including public funding</li> </ul>
<b>C. Finding a competent Energy Service Supplier</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding the right supplier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an overview of suppliers who have demonstrated reliability and competence in previous projects</li> <li>• Provide a checklist for SMEs for them to assess the energy service supplier</li> <li>• Arrange standardized packages of energy efficiency measures</li> </ul>
<b>D. Contracting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of energy efficiency projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support SMEs by providing templates of standards contracts and practical guidelines on how to draft agreements</li> </ul>

<b>E. Monitoring and follow-up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring the energy consumption to calculate achieved savings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organise workshops or meetings to support SMEs in their drafting a strategy for following-up the results</li> <li>Define and circulate common key performance indices and calculation methods for the collective that can also be used by the individual SMEs</li> </ul>
------------------------------------	---	---

### Support implementation of collective energy projects

As part of the collective approach, there may also be a potential for developing collective energy projects, for example, where two or more SMEs work together on a joint project which unlocks additional potential or benefits. In addition to increased efficiency through teamwork, collective action might deliver benefits, such as group discounts for the bulk purchase of energy saving products; efficiency savings through sharing resources, such as using waste heat for heating demands in other nearby SMEs or sharing renewable energy generated through joint investment.

Collective actions may start with a single collective project (for example, the installation of PV systems for energy sharing amongst a handful of SMEs). However, when success can be demonstrated, the motivation for additional or larger collective actions or the development of common energy goals amongst a larger group of SMEs may be activated.

Supporting SMEs to undertake collective actions follow a similar process as when supporting SMEs to undertake individual actions, however, there are a few additional steps linked to the coordination of the project between SMEs (steps A and D, below). Also the other steps will, however, often become more complex. The added tasks within each step are outlined in the table below.

Step	SME needs	Support options
<b>A. Arranging an energy team and project leader</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management of energy efficiency projects</li> </ul> <p><b>Comment:</b> When a project is initiated by the trusted partner, this step will be necessary. When a project is initiated by a group of SMEs, this step may already be completed</p>	<p>The project leader can provide SMEs with support specific to the organization of collective energy projects, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dealing with bureaucratic aspects of working with a collective approach, including contracting, how to make use of public funding options etc.</li> <li>Team management and conflict resolution, for example through the organization of regular meetings, and intervening in cases where there are disputes between SMEs</li> <li>Overall project management to ensure the project is implemented efficiently</li> </ul>

<b>B. Assessment of potential energy savings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimate energy consumption and its impact</li> <li>• Identification of potential solutions to reduce energy consumption</li> <li>• Investigation of other potential benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify potential projects based on the results of individual energy scans/audits at SMEs, or</li> <li>• Conduct an energy scan for the whole business area, to identify possible measures additional to those identified at an individual level (e.g. a heat network)</li> </ul>
<b>C. Creation of an energy project plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of energy efficiency projects</li> <li>• Search for public support and funding</li> <li>• Search for financing options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the SMEs in creating an energy project plan by outlining how the measure will be realised, what steps are required, and who is responsible for each step. A business case, including financing, should also be included.</li> <li>• Provide templates for the plans</li> <li>• Potentially arrange pre-financing to cover the costs of developing the project plan</li> </ul>
<b>D. Commitment of essential SMEs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of energy efficiency projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the energy scan results, business case and project plan to stimulate other SMEs to join the collective action (for some actions, a minimum number of SMEs may be needed)</li> <li>• Use other resources or initiatives, such as workshops, to communicate the benefits - including the multiple benefits - of the project to SMEs.</li> </ul>
<b>E. Finding a competent energy service supplier</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find the right supplier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition to the steps outlined for individual projects above, project and investment plans for the collective project on an SME-specific level may be needed.</li> </ul>
<b>F. Contracting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of energy efficiency projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contracts will need to be signed between SMEs, the investor(s) and supplier(s) and the project leader and energy team can assist SMEs in this process.</li> </ul>
<b>G. Realisation and maintenance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of energy efficiency projects</li> <li>• Monitor the energy consumption to calculate achieved savings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the support of the energy team, the project leader should ensure that all contractual agreements are fulfilled and that the energy project(s) are realised.</li> </ul>

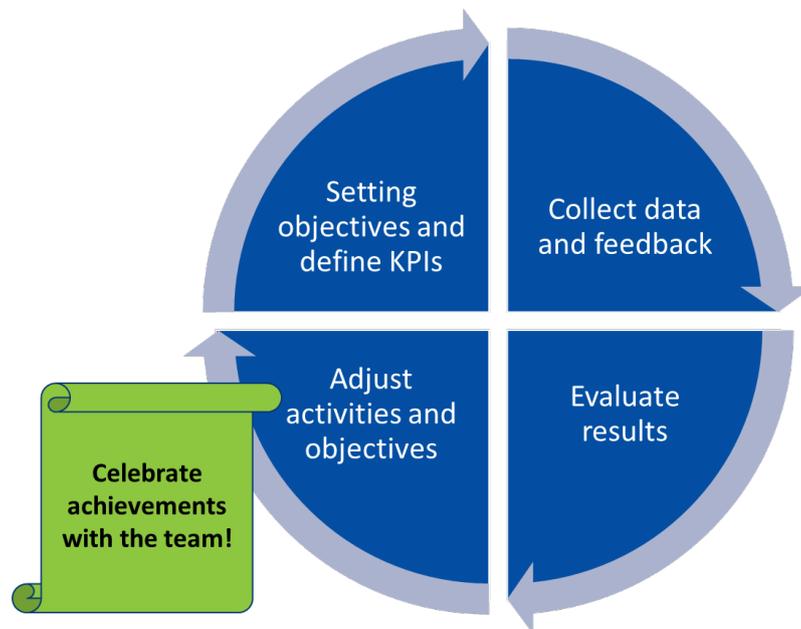
Coordinating collective energy projects is more complex and time-consuming than supporting SMEs to implement individual energy saving measures. On the other hand, they make it possible to fully harvest the benefits of a collective approach. To engage in collective energy projects, it is, therefore, imperative that the trusted partner has access to the right resources, both financially and from the involved stakeholder network. Energy regulations in some countries may limit the possibilities for certain energy-sharing projects, for instance, and if financial resources permit, engaging the services of professional energy consultants to navigate these and other such barriers may be beneficial. Some countries will provide subsidies for conducting feasibility studies for energy saving projects, which may also cover the services of a professional energy consultant. The trusted partner can help guide the project leader/energy team on the available options.

## Further reading

The [Explore](#) section of the portal provides further advice on how to implement the steps above, for both individual and collective projects, as well as templates, tools and surveys designed specifically for trusted partners and SMEs (see Sections C and E, including downloads). Further, at the portal there is a specific set of [training materials](#) related to the implementation of collective energy projects, including an introduction (*Collective Energy Projects: Introduction*), the identification of a project (*Identifying your collective energy project and obtaining commitment of SMEs*) and implementing it (*Offers and implementation*). Finally, there is also a set of training materials linked to Multiple Benefits, including *Multiple Benefits: Introduction*, and *Multiple Benefits: Strategic and Monetary Analysis*.

## D: Monitor and follow up on results

In this section, you will find an overview of benefits and approaches for monitoring and follow-up of the results from the activities of the collective. Monitoring provides the foundation for improving your own work, for communicating results and for inspiring to new efforts. The monitoring process follows an iterative process, often described as plan-do-check-act, as illustrated in the figure below.



Reasons to monitor and follow up (or evaluate) the results of the collective as a whole may be that:

- An ambition has been set for the collective: the result should be communicated to the group.
- Concrete and successful results that are communicated and disseminated (inside and outside the collective) are powerful motivational and public relations tools.
- Verifiable results must be shown in order for the funding agency to fulfill its reporting obligations.
- Monitoring and evaluating results is necessary to develop and improve your own work and the services offered to the SMEs. These should be documented as lessons learned.

### Setting objectives and define KPIs

The impact ambition of the energy collective can be intangible (i.e. not giving an exact value) and long-term and may not necessarily be related to energy efficiency – it could deal with becoming carbon neutral or improving the image of the business park. In many cases it is necessary to break down the ambition into more specific objectives, which can be monitored and followed-up. The objectives should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound and are often expressed in energy terms.

Examples of objectives can be:

- Organize xx workshops per year, focusing on energy efficiency management and its impact on climate emissions.
- Define and jointly implement energy management for at least xx% of participating SMEs by the end of the year.
- xx% of the participating SMEs have had an energy audit made, by the end of the year.
- Cover xx% of the available roof surface of the business park with photovoltaic panels by 2025.

Once the objectives have been defined, you should be able to define Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), that can be used to evaluate the objectives. Depending on the focus of your energy collective, KPIs could include:

- kWh final/primary energy saved per year
- tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-eq emissions saved per year
- Financial value of energy savings
- Number of companies participating in the energy collective
- Number of energy audits carried out/ planned
- Number of energy efficiency measures implemented since the initiative started
- Number of SMEs helped with finding funding

### **Collecting data and feedback**

To determine to what extent the measurable objectives are met, data needs to be collected. The data collected needs to be adapted to both the objectives and the time frame. Some data will be simple to keep track of yourself. Yet, for other KPIs, data will have to be collected from the SMEs. Clarifying in advance to the companies which data will be needed and why will make this task more efficient. When data are not available or the effort to collect them exceed their relevance, it may also be necessary to make more general assumptions.

The monitoring should include also a qualitative approach, based on feedback collected from the participants. This will allow you to evaluate the approach chosen - whether the included activities are relevant for the SMEs needs, if proposed tools are useful and easy to use and to check which benefits the SMEs see from participating.

### **Evaluate the results**

Based on collected data and feedback, it is possible to evaluate to which extent the objectives have been reached, or possibly over-shot. In the evaluation, it is also important to include an analysis of the reasons. What has been especially successful and what did not work? These learnings should be analysed and documented as lessons learned, to be considered in the development and implementation of future activities.

## **Adjust activities and objectives**

The evaluation should lead to a review of the actions and resources needed to reach the objectives. It may also be relevant to review and adjust the objectives, if unrealistic or not ambitious enough.

## **Celebrate and communicate achievements**

Finally, remember to [communicate and celebrate results](#) – both internally and externally. This is very important, both for keeping up the motivation from all involved stakeholders, including financers, and for securing future results.

In addition, it may be useful to develop appropriate ways of communicating them, for example using basic data visualizations, photographs or short videos, or other communication tools to facilitate reporting and dissemination.

## **Further reading**

The Implement section of the portal includes [training materials](#), further advice on how to implement the steps above (included in *Energy collectives: Defining activities*). Further, the same section of the portal provides [tools](#) that can support the development of the monitoring process within an SME (*Monitoring & Targeting (M&T)*, available in English and Romanian and the *Monitoring tool*, available in English, Dutch, Romanian and Italian).

## E: Identified areas in which SMEs may need support

This section includes brief descriptions, based on the needs of the SMEs, of how to support SMEs in improving their energy efficiency, including the areas of energy management, and the approaches used to supporting them. Consequently, the section provides a more detailed foundation for the planning of activities, as described in Section C. It will primarily be relevant if you have the role of a Trusted Partner or represent an Energy Service Supplier. It is equally relevant whether you support SMEs on an individual basis or collectively.

In the table, below, all the links to support materials is referring to different sub-sections of the [energy efficient SME portal](http://www.energyefficientsme.eu) (www.energyefficientsme.eu).

Areas of SME needs		Description and available tools or materials
<b>E.1</b>	Knowledge building on energy efficiency and energy management	Many SMEs lack basic knowledge with regards to energy saving measures, since this is not part of their core business. Resources to support SMEs can be found at, for example, National Energy Efficiency Agency websites, and through sector studies/ guidelines/online courses that help explain the benefits of energy management and energy efficiency. In addition, the portal includes various energy potential scanning, or energy check-up <a href="#">tools</a> , <a href="#">training materials</a> , concrete descriptions of <a href="#">best practices</a> for energy efficient technologies, and a range of <a href="#">inspirational stories</a> from SMEs who have implemented energy saving measures.
<b>E.2</b>	Estimation of energy consumption and its impact	Not all SMEs have a good understanding as to how much they spend on energy and the impact this can have on their financial performance. To address this need, SMEs may need support in hiring an expert to conduct an energy audit or – to start with - a simplified version of the audit, known as an energy scan, could be undertaken to gain a basic understanding of energy-related costs and the potential for improvements within an SME. The portal provides links to several useful <a href="#">tools</a> for conducting energy scans.
<b>E.3</b>	Identification of potential solutions to reduce the energy consumption	The best way for SMEs to identify potential energy saving measures is for them to undertake an energy audit. Alternatively, SMEs can also find guidance via a list of best practice actions, with demonstrated energy saving benefits, as appropriate to their business and technology need. See for example the descriptions of almost 60 <a href="#">best practices</a> at the portal.
<b>E.4</b>	Investigation of multiple benefits	Energy saving measures often have other benefits, including for example employee health and well-being, reduced need for maintenance of equipment,

Areas of SME needs		Description and available tools or materials
		strengthened competitive advantage etc. The closer that these benefits align with the core business of the SME, the easier it is to make the case for the implementation of energy saving measures. Tools, such as energy audit tools, can be used to estimate the economic and environmental benefits of implementing measures, while other tools can estimate non-energy benefits. The analysis can be supported by the <i>Business Case and Multiple Benefits tool</i> . Also, at the portal, there are extensive <a href="#">training materials</a> on multiple benefits.
E.5	Find the right supplier	Not all SMEs have knowledge about suppliers of energy efficiency technologies, and therefore they may be helped by suggestions of reliable and available suppliers. Information on potential suppliers can be found using online searches, liaising with other Trusted Partners through the <a href="#">online community</a> , available via the portal or through the contacts of energy auditors. The latter option may be more appropriate for finding specialist suppliers who have the skills needed to recommend and install more complex technologies. At the portal there is also a <i>Supplier Selection tool</i> (in German and English).
E.6	Search for public support and funding	There are differences in the public support and funding available to SMEs to undertake audits or implement energy efficiency measures between countries, and between local/regional areas within a country. Trusted partners can support SMEs by acting as an adviser as to what public support and funding exists and can also liaise with local authorities on accessing support.
E.7	Search for financing options	SMEs often need support to navigate the search for financing options, including traditional financing (provided by banks or financiers); or through innovative financing (energy service agreements, environmental upgrade finance or power purchase agreements). This type of information is dependent on the national/regional situation, and may be changeable, why coordinated, and regionally based, expert support is needed. For public funding and measures, such as subsidies, national/regional energy efficiency agency websites, in general, provide up-to-date information.
E.8	Management of energy efficiency projects	SMEs may not have the time or resources to implement or monitor the results of energy efficiency projects, and therefore need support with this. Trusted partners or other stakeholders can support with, for instance, developing an action plan, finding a supplier, or establish a consortium for applying for financing. <a href="#">Tools</a> and <a href="#">training</a>

Areas of SME needs		Description and available tools or materials
		materials that can support facilitating this process are available on the portal.
<b>E.9</b>	Assistance with complying to energy regulations	SMEs are not usually required to meet individual obligations under energy regulations, unless they are covered under the EU ETS, however for SMEs who are covered by regulation, further information can be found on government websites and in Appendix E.2 of the <a href="#">complete handbook</a> .
<b>E.10</b>	Spread the “energy efficiency culture” in the company	The full potential of energy saving measures is only achieved when everyone in the company is supportive in terms of their behavior, but also in identifying potential improvements. It is also essential to involve people in the company in decision-making to avoid situations where energy saving measures are not aligned with the core requirements of the business.
<b>E.11</b>	Setting up a long-term energy efficiency strategy in the company	Setting up a long-term energy efficiency strategy that enables SMEs to move beyond the low-hanging fruits requires not only effort in drafting an effective strategy, but also the support for ensuring that resources are available for implementation. Trusted Partners have a role to play in helping the SME draft this strategy, with or without the help of an external auditor.
<b>E.12</b>	Developing a systematic approach to energy efficiency management	For all SMEs it is useful to find a structured approach to consciously and regularly planning, implementing and following-up measures for improving energy efficiency. The approach should clarify responsibilities and activities needed, as well as concrete steps to continuous improvements. SMEs may need support in implementing the 4-step process outlined in the <a href="#">complete handbook</a> that covers the 6 aspects of such a workplan.
<b>E.13</b>	Monitoring the energy consumption and calculate the savings	Calculations of energy savings require the establishment of a baseline and ongoing monitoring of energy consumption within an SME, potentially including sub-metering of consumption within a particular process or building. SMEs need support for developing this. The portal provides links to monitoring <a href="#">tools</a> .

## APPENDIX: Approach to revising the methodology

The GEAR@SME methodology, described in detail in the complete handbook, has through these guidelines been developed and revised from the following aspects:

- Shortened and focused on the key aspects of implementation, to be more applicable for the target groups. The comprehensiveness and complexity of the Handbook has been lifted as an important barrier for reaching out with the approach. In this process, it has also been possible to further highlighting certain aspects of the methodology – through the choice of aspects that are kept in the shorter version.
- Clarification of the role and further stressing of the importance of the Multiplier Organizations, for multiplication *and* for providing support.
- Increased focus on the need for support (financially and with other resources) for Trusted Partners and the collectives.
- Increased focus on the need for funding of activities in general, and of including solutions for financing (for collectives and SMEs) in the activities and offers.
- Added stress on the importance of energy scans/audits for motivation and as a starting point for collaboration.
- Development of the description of monitoring (section D).

The revisions are based on the input from the use cases that have been carried out in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Romania, as part of the GEAR@SME project. The input has been collected through a series of activities:

- A working session, carried out as part of the second progress meeting, on 30 September 2021, in which the experience from adopting the methodology was discussed.
- Material developed for communication about the methodology via the online portal [www.energyefficientsme.eu](http://www.energyefficientsme.eu) (Explore)
- The process of developing training materials explaining the methodology (available via the portal).
- Discussions that have taken place as part of T6.2 Lessons learned
- The Advisory Board meeting, stressing especially the need for including financial challenges and aspects.
- A questionnaire sent to all partners of the GEAR@SME project during the final period of the use cases (October – November 2022), with the purpose of providing input for the three tasks 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4. The sections of the questionnaire especially used for the revision of the methodology have been added below, together with a summary of the main findings/input.

### Summary of the main findings from the questionnaire

General findings related to multiplication of the GEAR@SME methodology and the initiation of local SME energy collectives:

- The key role of the Multiplier Organizations for guiding the Trusted Partners needs to be clarified and strengthened. Training sessions can be used as a starting point.
- Financial and other benefits for the Trusted Partners from engaging need to be identified and created. At least funding (part of) their time, which is a scarce resource for Trusted Partners. For the methodology to be successful, it is necessary that the Trusted Partner has the time and economic resources to be able to follow the project and apply the collective approach.
- It is important to also involve funding agencies in the development. In some countries, Trusted Partners, or the business and industrial parks, are not eligible for funding to implement renewable energy or energy efficiency measures. In many situations funding options for consortia, such as an SME energy collective, are limited.
- Developing national examples and the national network need to be included in the methodology to increase the multiplication.

Findings related to the concrete activities for multiplication of the GEAR@SME methodology:

- The importance of face-to-face communication between Multiplier Organizations and Trusted Partners (and other stakeholders) should be further stressed.
- Emphasize the benefits of mutual learnings – not only within the collectives, but also between Trusted Partners, via online platforms or by strengthening their network with other activities (physical meetings).
- Considering broadening the examples of Trusted Partners, since not all countries have, for instance, business park managers.
- Highlight the importance of trust and networking competence at the Trusted Partners’ – they need to be able to communicate with SMEs.

Findings related to the long-term support for Trusted Partners (from Multiplier Organizations) and the development of the collectives:

- Stress the importance of involving Energy Service Suppliers (energy competence and energy consultants) in the stakeholder network.
- Underline the importance of starting with energy scans of the SMEs and/or the SME cluster.
- To develop collective projects, there is a need for the right regulatory conditions, and this is not always there in all countries. The development of more favorable regulatory conditions for energy communities can be highlighted as an example.
- Webinars and trainings are important tools for reaching the Trusted Partners, and to help them understand the methodology.
- The importance of applying multiple benefits, and not relying on only energy arguments, need to be clarified and adopted by Trusted Partners.

Findings in relation to motivating SMEs to participate:

- It is important to, at an early stage, identify a strong connection point/common interest for SMEs (e.g., implementation of a certain measure such as installation of PV systems for energy sharing, identifying sector-specific issues or presentation of a relevant funding scheme). The development of the network, common goals etc can start from there. The first project may also contribute to producing resources for other measures.
- Do not forget the economic aspects (increasing energy prices) as an important motivator for SMEs. It is difficult to motivate with networking events and energy scans only.
- The use of energy scans of individual SMEs or the cluster (done by professionals) should be stressed. They are important to motivate and create trusted results as well as contributing with first insights and conversation starter, although more detailed analysis is needed for investment decisions. This scoping should be well communicated to Trusted Partners and via Trusted Partners to SMEs.
- Emphasize the importance of interacting with SMEs; being open about intention and scope of the activities, to build trust; show results from others for motivation; and use regular status updates to keep stakeholders and SMEs involved.

#### Findings in relation to the implementation of collective energy projects:

- Clarify that Trusted Partners are not expected to (or generally able to) provide the energy expertise, or resources in terms of time themselves, but need support from energy service suppliers. Thus, access to funding is also key.
- For country/situation specific conditions, use cases for financing need to be developed. The importance of Multiplier Organizations to support energy collectives in meeting conditions for financing investments in (collective) assets/measures should be stressed.
- Note that in some countries, energy regulations limit the possibilities to develop collective energy projects, therefore the regulatory framework may need to be developed to ensure eligibility for collective solutions.
- Stress the importance of involving all decision makers (in time): e.g. DSO, municipality, province.
- Try to find ways (depending on local situation) that ensure/streamline access to data.