



NETWORKS

Expression of Interest for “SME Flex” Industry Partners

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Introduction

ESB Networks plays a critical role in facilitating Ireland's transition towards a net zero future. Our “Networks for Net Zero Strategy” supports the Government's target to reach net zero by 2050, by ensuring that there is a net zero ready electricity network in place by 2040. Our strategy focuses on three key objectives: decarbonising electricity, creating resilient infrastructure, and empowering our customers. Given the scale of ambition and the pace of change required to meet our net zero targets, innovation will play a key role in achieving these objectives. We strive to introduce innovative ideas, initiatives, technologies, and processes that not only meet the current needs of our customers but also pave the way for a sustainable and efficient energy future.

We are seeking to collaborate with 1-3 Industry Partners (e.g. Supplier, Aggregator, Energy Innovator) to deliver our “SME Flex” Proof of Concept (PoC). The purpose of “SME Flex”, to be run over 12 months, is to understand the role that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) can play in supporting demand side flexibility and the optimal conditions under which these business customers can participate (e.g., event window timings). We aim to enable flexible electricity demand on the electricity distribution network by engaging business customers across a range of sectors to participate in demand side flexibility.

Note, for the purpose of this document and the “SME Flex” initiative, ESB Networks is defining these SME customers on the basis of DUoS Groups: DG5 – DG7. For details on DUoS Tariff Groups see link [here](#).

Context and background

The National Energy Demand Strategy¹, specifically Area 2 Demand Flexibility and Responses, is designed to increase the potential for demand response from users, including large energy users at times when it is beneficial for the system and for energy users. Considering this and in line with our multi-year plans, ESB Networks aims to launch initiatives that build awareness, education, and engagement with demand side flexibility for customers.

The “SME Flex” Proof of Concept (PoC) aims to target the non-domestic (business) customer base to raise awareness and engagement with demand side flexibility. ESB Networks recognises that a tender process is too onerous for individual SMEs to undertake. As well as this, ESB Networks does not have a direct relationship and channel to engage with business customers. Therefore the key differentiator of “SME Flex” is a collaboration with 1-3 Industry Partners (e.g. supplier, aggregator, energy innovator) that do have direct relationships with business customers and for these partner(s) to set up and operationalise the “SME Flex” product, coordinating customer-facing delivery activities in collaboration with ESB Networks.

Learnings from the “SME Flex” PoC will be used to help shape future demand side flexibility products and services and or how non-domestic business customers can be best engaged to participate in demand side flexibility. Therefore, we are actively seeking Industry Partner(s) to proactively work with ESB Networks to deliver this initiative.

¹ https://cruie-live-96ca64acab2247eca8a850a7e54b-5b34f62.divio-media.com/documents/NEDS_Decision_Paper_and_Annex.pdf

Expression of Interest (EOI)

The purpose of the initiative is to understand the role that SMEs can play in supporting demand side flexibility and the optimal conditions under which these business customers can participate (e.g., event window timings).

The PoC will be structured around a 12 month-operational cycle, encompassing both winter and summer demand response periods to capture seasonal variability in load and availability. The intention is that recruitment for the PoC would begin in September 2026 and run until mid-January 2027 (date tbc), with the operational delivery period commencing on 1st October 2026, and ending on 30th September 2027.

There will be 2 elements to the delivery structure for SMEs signed up to the PoC:

- 1. Daily demand down service window: Monday – Friday (excluding Bank Holidays) 5-7pm demand down window. No communications will be sent for this delivery period.**
- 2. Ad hoc demand down windows: ca. 1 per month, 2 hrs in duration, which can occur any time Monday – Friday (excluding Bank Holidays) and communication will be issued for these events in advance.**

At a high level, the industry partner(s) we collaborate with would be responsible for the following:

- recruitment of the customer base,
- co-designing the final product and detailed customer journey,
- operationalising the product,
- engagement with the end customer,
- conducting baselining,
- conducting validation and settlement activities,
- conducting relevant research,
- report project findings back to ESB Networks.

ESB Networks, at a high level, would be responsible for the following:

- determining ad hoc event timings and communicating these to the industry partner(s),
- providing the baselining methodology,
- conducting audits on baselining and validation & settlement activities executed by the industry partner(s).

High Level Customer Journey:

Step-by-step outline of how SMEs will interact with the product

1. Potential participant SMEs (based on eligibility criteria) will be made aware of the proposal and its benefits by the participating Industry Partner(s)
2. Participant will gather information for the sign-up process while being supported by the Industry Partner
3. Participant submits application to Industry Partner
4. Participant reviews the proposed baseline and prepares to participate
5. Participant agrees to relevant T&C's for participating in the programme
6. Participant participates in events as they can
7. Participant is remunerated (on a regular basis) based on the amount of flexibility they provided
8. Participant receives and responds to surveys
9. Participant receives ongoing communications and educational content from the Industry Partner (case studies, best practice etc.)
10. Participant will be provided with support throughout the programme including help with disputes

Benefits for Industry Partner:

1. Receive a payment from ESB Networks in return for MWh of flexible capacity and sharing learnings of the study
2. Introduce an additional service which can be provided to SME customer base
3. Lead the way in the market by working with ESB Networks to provide vital commercial input into the “SME Flex” initiative and be seen as an innovator
4. Increase sustainability credentials of the organisation
5. Assist the network and security of supply

Benefits for Industry Partner's Customers:

1. Access new product and therefore revenue stream for participating in “SME Flex”
2. Learn more about their consumption to identify ways to optimise operations and reduce costs

We are inviting potential industry partners (e.g. Electricity suppliers, Aggregators, Energy Innovators) to express their interest in participating in this “SME Flex” initiative.

Eligibility to participate

Final details and requirements will be designed during the co-design stage once industry partner(s) have been selected, however potential industry partners should have the ability to:

1) Recruit eligible business customers:

- a) Use your understanding of business customers (e.g. consumption data patterns) to identify eligible customers and recruit a diverse range to deliver flexibility and meet the flexibility target of 1.3 MW per industry partnership.

SME eligibility criteria (subject to change):

- DUoS groups between DG5-DG7
- Shares consumption data
- Geographically diverse/spread
- Have QH or Smart Meters on interval billing (MCC12)
- Lower than 50,000 kWh consumption per annum, per premises
- Maximum flexible capacity per customer of 200 kW
- Fewer than 250 employees
- Annual turnover \leq €50 million or balance sheet total \leq €43 million
- Independent (not owned $>$ 25% by a large enterprise)

2) Set up and execution of “SME Flex”:

a) Operationalise the product:

- Ensure a simple sign-up process for business customers
- Ability to receive event triggers from ESB Networks DMSO
- Ability to communicate event windows and other additional content with customers e.g. via SMS or email

b) Coordination of the product:

- Ability to baseline customer consumption
- Validate customer kWh/MWh demand reduced
- Communicate “SME Flex” events with customers
- Issue appropriate remuneration to customers

3) Learn about business customer behaviour through the “SME Flex” product:

a) Conduct relevant research and measurement

b) Share customer profile information and research findings (details TBD) on an ongoing basis with ESB Networks

Register Expression of Interest

To register an Expression of Interest please complete the form online at the link below.

This form will ask the following:

Organisation details

1. What is the name of your organisation?
2. What is the email contact for the person registering an Expression of Interest on behalf of the organisation?
3. What is the position of the person registering an Expression of Interest on behalf of the organisation?

Recruitment: To demonstrate the organisation’s customer base and distribution

4. Volume and Spread of Business Customers: Please provide detailed information on the volume and geographic spread of business customers whose consumption data you can access and monitor for recruitment, baselining, validation, and remuneration purposes. Include specifics such as DUoS group, geography, average annual consumption, and any other relevant classifications. E.g., 300 customers, DG5 – Donegal (50), Dublin (150), Cork (100), average 82 MWh - 160 MWh annual consumption.

Operationalising & Coordination: To demonstrate the strength of organisation’s operational capability

5. Operationalise: Describe the technology and resources that your organisation has in place to operationalise the proposed product, e.g. ability to implement a simple sign-up process for business customers; ability to receive event triggers from ESB Networks DMSO; ability to communicate events to customers.

Highlight any relevant systems, tools and/ teams that your organisation would use to operationalise the product e.g., communication platforms, customer portals etc.

6. Coordination: Describe the technology and resources your organisation has in place to coordinate the customer facing activities for the proposed product, e.g. ability to baseline customer consumption; validate customer kWh/MWh demand reduced; how you would communicate “SME Flex” events with customers; issue appropriate remuneration to customers.

Highlight any relevant systems, tools and/ teams that your organisation would use to run the product e.g., communication platforms, customer portal etc.

Learning and Sharing: To demonstrate the organisation’s ability and appetite to share learnings from the project

7. Research Capability: Please provide details on your organisation’s ability to conduct relevant research related to this pilot. Highlight any relevant systems, tools, or resources. E.g., CSAT surveys, focus groups, research partners.
8. Willingness to Share Learnings: Indicate whether your organisation would be willing to share learnings from participating in this “SME Flex” project with ESB Networks and other industry stakeholders.

The closing date for the Expression of Interest is April 19th, 2026.

Please click [here](#) to proceed with the Expression of Interest.

Success criteria

The responses to Q4-Q8 in the expression of interest form will be evaluated against each other, to identify the most suitable industry partner for ESB Networks’ “SME Flex” initiative. The categories will be assessed as follows:

Recruitment:

- Evaluate organisation’s customer base and distribution: Volume of business customers that organisation can read consumption data from; distribution across multiple geographies and DuoS groups.

Operationalise & Run:

- Evaluate organisation’s strength of operational capability i.e. readiness to operationalise and run the project (e.g. existing systems and processes that could support the proposed product in place).

Lean & Share:

- Evaluate organisation’s ability to conduct research with their customer base and appetite for sharing these learnings with ESB Networks and other industry stakeholders.



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