

Estimating the type, cost and timescales of the studies needed to get planning permission for a hydro power project

This exercise will encourage attendees to consider and discuss what information will be needed to support the planning application for a small-scale community hydropower project, if expert support will be required, how long it will take to gather and prepare the information and how much it might cost.

Time needed

50 minutes (plus 10 further minutes if you want open discussion)

- 10 minutes to explain and break into groups
- 20 minutes for group discussions
- 20 minutes to feedback and create timeline
- Optional 10 more minutes for discussion

Films that accompany this exercise

'Getting Planning Permission' (disc 2): required

'Introduction to hydro' (disc 1): required

'Setting up a hydro power project' (disc 1): required

Materials needed

- A3/flipchart sheets for each group to make notes and marked up like **Table 1** below.
- Pens/markers for groups to make notes.
- Series of A3 sheets with tape/blu-tack, or similar, so they can be attached to the wall to create the timeline.
- Large marker for facilitator to create timeline.

Arranging the room

Stick the A3 sheets to the wall (landscape) and to create one long sheet which you will mark up with the timeline during the feedback from the exercise.

Running the exercise

Stage 1) Grouping and explaining (10 minutes)

Explain to the whole audience that you are going to work in groups to assess all the information needed to inform the preparation/determination of a planning application for a hydro power turbine.

Ask them to split into groups (how many depends on the total number of people/tables/flipcharts you have).

Provide each group with a copy of Table 1 and pens.

Tell them that they are going to consider all the potential information that will be needed to inform the preparation/determination of a hydro plant planning application, where this information could be available (or if it will need to be a bespoke commission), if expert support will be needed, the potential time needed to obtain the information and the potential costs involved.

They should record their thoughts on the pre-prepared **Table 1** (see below).

Whilst the groups are doing the exercise mark up a skeleton timeline of the A3 sheets on the wall which will be added to during the feedback – see example at the top of the next page:

Setting up the groups and explaining this should take not more than 10 minutes

Stage 2: Carrying out the exercise (20 minutes)

Allow not more than 20 minutes for the groups to follow the instructions you have given. Circulate the room to make sure they all understand.

Stage 3: Feedback

Advise people when there are just 5 minutes remaining to allow them to finalise their feedback.

Once everyone has finished, get one person from each group to feedback a maximum of two points from each of the categories from the sheet – this limitation will allow all the groups to feedback with limited repetition. If you have a small number of groups you can ask for any other points once each group has given their initial feedback.

As each of the groups provides their feedback annotate the timeline accordingly – see example below:

Once the timeline is filled with all the possible stages of the process, all the time estimates can be added together to give total timescale for the project, but remember that

some of the research/studies can be carried out at the same time. The timeline can also be annotated with some cost estimates, where these are known.

Explain to the group that there are many factors involved and therefore this timescale can only be taken as a rough estimate at this stage, and the whole process may be quicker or slower.

Stage 4: Optional discussion period

This could be a useful point to take suggestions from the floor about what you might start researching first. It's likely that the issue of cost will arise early on, so you can make it clear that you have information on funding, and the financial support from the feed-in tariff, which you will be addressing either later in this event, or in a future event.

Things you might want to throw into the discussion are:

- Local knowledge, experience and contacts
- Working with the local authority
- Responsibilities for co-ordinating information/tasks

Tie up the discussion by asking if anyone would be interested in getting involved with researching the options. And remember to record all the comments made on a flipchart – you can ask a member of the audience to be the recorder if you are running this event alone.

Output

The feedback from each of the groups should be used to create a timeline of the planning application process, highlighting key milestones and illustrating the timing implications of requirements such as environmental or ecological surveys, some of which can only be conducted at certain times of the year. This can also be used to highlight necessary work that will incur significant costs, which can assist with budgeting for the project.

Timeline 1 Before filling in



Timeline 2 Example of what the timeline might look like as the group fill in the detail

This meeting	Visual impact assessment	Environment Agency licences	Submission and determination of planning application	First energy generation from hydro plant
	Up to 12 months	6 months	Up to 4 months	

Table 1 The information in this table (except for the column headings) is provided as a guide only and for the facilitator. This should not be given to the groups until the end of the feedback session. Timescales/cost will vary on a case by case basis, use the information in these columns as a guide to get attendees thinking about costs and timescales.

Research and/or information needed	Potential sources	Expert support needed? (Y/N)	Timescale	Cost
Environmental Impact Assessment (comprehensive and detailed if a large scheme)	Specialist consultant	Yes	Up to 12 months to allow for completion of surveys	High. Between £10-20k
Environment Agency Impoundment Licence	Environment Agency (England & Wales)	See Environment Agency website for further details		
Environment Agency Abstraction Licence	Environment Agency (England & Wales)	See Environment Agency website for further details		
Flood Defence Permit	Environment Agency (England & Wales)	See Environment Agency website for further details		
Migratory fish survey	Angling community/clubs (for initial info.) then specialist consultant	Yes	Weeks	Medium. £3k- £5k
Survey and engagement with river users	Landowners/river users	No	Weeks/months	
Ownership, access and leasing issues, way-leaves for cables	Landowners	No	Weeks – months (depending on easily identifying landowners)	
Electrical connection – design constraints	District Network Operator	Yes – if design study required		Medium. £3k- £5k (if study required)
Type of system	System supplier/installer	Yes, if complicated building/different options	Weeks	
Planning permission (for turbine, turbine house, access track, etc.)	Planning Portal and/or local planning department	Yes, if detailed plans required	Weeks	Low. Less than £1,000 unless complicated
Listed building and/or conservation area considerations	Planning Portal and/or local planning department	Yes, if plans required	Weeks	Low. Less than £1,000 unless complicated
Review management options/benefits of ESCo	Hydro supplier and/or installer	Yes	Weeks	Medium. £2k – £4k