Insights from the roundtable sessions at Flex Day 2025

This news update synthesises the main points and insights from the three roundtable sessions held across the FlexForum Flex Day held in September 2025. Drawing from the session worksheets and notes of the verbal overviews by tables/groups at each session.

'Quote marks' represent written or verbal quotes, with the qualification that quotes may not be precise due to either messy handwriting or note-taking.

The roundtable sessions explored three aspects of flexibility project design.

- Involving customers and successfully asking people to say yes to flex.
- Flex-y equipment installation and integration.
- Flex mechanism design and procurement.

The three sessions identified two broad types of activity which are critical to maximising the potential value of flexible resources.

The flexibility What… involves tasks which would make flexibility a routine and sensible choice for households, businesses and communities making choices about a sustainable, reliable, resilient and cost-effective power supply.

- Build consumer trust
- Enable customer engagement which assists people to feel secure in their flexibility decision-making
- Develop customer flexibility propositions that reflect preferences and deliver tangible benefits.

The flexibility How…involves tasks which would make flexibility a practical and easy choice for people to make

- Make flexibility a standard feature of equipment and appliances
- Enable seamless and worry-free integration of flexibility into the power system
- Provide strong technical support for flexibility integration and operation.

The Flexibility What

Build customer trust

1. **Build customer trust**: It's crucial to build trust with customers. This involves clear communication of flexibility benefits to the individual and to the wider system and flagging how privacy, cybersecurity and other risks are managed to ensure customers feel secure in their early flex adoption.

   The most common view from the sessions is that the electricity sector must build consumer trust if it is to access and use the flexible resources of households, businesses and communities.

   Perspectives on building trust included 'a relatable translator to build trust' or 'a trusted third party or partner' to 'minimise confusion (giving increasing complexity)' and 'understand and address customer fears'.

   The call to 'build consumer trust' can be reframed as 'address customer concerns' that they will be worse off by saying yes to flex. This reframing more closely aligns with the insight that people are already concerned that the electricity sector is taking excessive and unfair profits and, by saying yes to flex, people would be allowing the sector to take further advantage of them by keeping any financial benefits and offloading risks and costs.

This suggests that trust is more about the message and what people are told, hear and can find out about the opportunities and benefits of their flexibility choices so they feel secure in their flexibility choices.

Enable customer engagement which assists flexibility decision making

2. **Enable customer engagement which assists people to feel secure in their flexibility decision-making**: It's crucial that engagement addresses the concerns people have about saying yes to flex (and the electricity sector generally). This involves clear communication of what people want to know about flex for them to easily understand what saying yes to flex means, particularly the monetary incentives, any other benefits and trade-offs, and the simplicity and ease of being flex-y.

   The sessions indicate that communicating what people want to know about flex requires understanding the motivations people have for adopting flexibility, and tailoring information and customer propositions to answer questions such as 'what is flex?, 'what is in it for me?', 'how does it work?', 'what compromises will flex result in for me?' and 'how do I know I'm not getting ripped off?'.

   The sessions also indicate the answers will need to be available at 'the appropriate points for people to be curious and maybe act' and provide a pathway – 'who helps me get it given commercial agendas?' and 'how is the proposition sold?' – to customer propositions which enable people to confidently choose specific outcomes, benefits and trade-offs by saying yes to flex.

Develop customer flexibility propositions

3. **Develop customer flexibility propositions that reflect preferences and deliver tangible benefits**: Customer flexibility propositions are how flexibility is requested. They need to translate the complexity of various system use cases into a value proposition, including the benefits the customer will receive and the return on investment.

   The sessions identified customer flexibility propositions[1] as the key to unlocking flexibility by providing information such as 'what is in it for the customer?', 'what flex is valuable?', 'what are the benefits?, and 'what will I need to do?' to enable people to assess their flex-y options and make confident choices.

   A consistent view is propositions should simplify the financial and physical complexity of the power supply chain and be easy for people to understand, give them agency and options by being 'simple and low touch', providing certainty about service levels with safeguards that the lights (or electric vehicle etc) will be there when needed, and making the value of flexing clear.

   A common observation was that people will want to know 'what is the value that I'll get?' and 'will you pass on to me all the benefit and how do I know?'. For example, 'if I'm reducing my offtake/sacrificing do I get the benefit?'. The implication is people want the ability to understand where value comes from and where it ends up. This probably reflects the low trust in the sector.

   This means propositions will need to do the heavy lifting to address these concerns by communicating the financial and other benefits and return on investment in a way that is easy for customers to understand and compare options.

   However, questions remain about the mechanisms activating flexibility propositions such as 'what is the correct tool for the issue?'. Plus an unmet need for 'clarity about the effectiveness of mechanisms used across the value chain'. For example, 'how much do you want to actively control?' or 'put signals out into world and rely on a response?'.

[1] Customer propositions are the service or product the customer buys from an electricity retailer. For example, the traditional retail service involves a retailer supplying the customer electricity at a defined price or tariff.

People (or someone acting on their behalf) should be able to draw a line between the flexible response requested through the customer proposition, the pricing and physical coordination mechanisms which activate the proposition (and flexibility), and the specific system costs avoided by the flexible response.

The Flexibility How

Make flexibility a standard feature

4. **Make flexibility a standard feature of equipment and appliances**: Equipment and appliances in homes and businesses need to be flex capable either with connectivity enabled out of the box or during installation (or later). This involves providing people and installers a set of interoperable integration processes to enable the device flex to be accessible to the human and, with their agreement via a proposition, to the power system.

   The sessions identified practical questions about the technology they are buying, such as 'what products do I need?', 'what does it mean for my electrical installation?', 'will the technology become technically obsolete?', and 'how much will it cost me?'.

   Perhaps more critically, the sessions identified that electricity retailers and distributors – the traditional touchpoints between people and the power system – are not currently a common point of sale and have limited experience with selling consumer products that can be flex-y.

   This means purchase questions are more likely to be answered by consumer advocates, electricians and at point of sale. The advice coming from them will be influenced by the trust building achieved through customer engagement and the zeitgeist of customer flexibility propositions…my electrician told me this is a good idea.

   Their job will be easier if there are minimum technical device standards and interoperable communication protocols to quickly gauge 'any wiring or configuration limitations' and assess 'is this the right product for me'.

Enable seamless and worry-free integration

5. **Enable seamless and worry-free integration of flexibility into the power system**: Flexible devices need to easily integrate into the electricity market and system to maximise the value of flexibility. This involves, having installers with the necessary skill sets, standardised integration processes, and providing people with clear information about the impacts and trade-offs of offering flexibility to the power system.

   The sessions highlighted there are multiple pathways to flexible resources – from an out-of-the box device to something requiring specialist installation – that will rely on a range of 'skillsets to manage and support, install and integrate' that flexibility. Three overlapping skills-sets were identified each with the overarching objective of 'minimising the number of visits and intrusion into homes and businesses'.

   - physical hardware installation, ranging in complexity from plugging a device in out-of-the box to installation by electrician and other trades
   - on premise integration via a single API, involving for example, the owner pairing a new device to an energy management system or application
   - off premise integration involving multiple APIs, involving for example the owner or installer coordinating with a contact centre to remotely update system settings.

The value of the FlexTalk programme[2] learning about installation and integration practices was emphasised, particularly the importance of having 'clear steps that installers etc can follow to deliver a good outcome' and 'strong on-call technical support during configuration to resolve complex integration issues'.

The view that standardised integration processes are needed relates to questions about who does what (ie, who is integrating with who) based on whether 'active control is needed or just a discretionary response to a signal', 'is the integration via B2C, B2B or B2M?' and 'which is the right entity to be the interface?'

A clear theme of the integration discussions was the need to clearly spell out the implications to the human of integrating their device, including the option to over-ride any specific requests to use their flexibility. A representative view was people should be clearly informed about 'what compromises will I need to make?', 'what might I lose?' and 'when giving control of my heat pump, how does that work?'

Provide strong technical support

6. **Provide strong technical support for flexibility integration and operation**: People will not always have the skills needed to be flex-y and will require strong on-call technical support during flexibility integration and operation. This involves addressing the costs of technical support and ensuring that customers have a single point of contact for their flexibility needs.

   The sessions identified that 'rolling out and managing flexible devices is not a traditional skill set of the electricity sector', with activities extend beyond physical integration to include …'customer sign up, contracting and onboarding, the install, maintenance/service (including managing internet/wifi connectivity problems and change of renter/owner.'

   There is no obvious single point of contact for people experiencing difficulties with integrating or operating their flexibility. This was highlighted by questions about 'what level of support and back-office functionality and resourcing is needed?' and 'who does that?'. This gap could undermine trust in flexibility and the sectors license to use it.

Get in touch: info@flexforum.nz - for more information on FlexForum and become part of the conversation.

[2] Two relevant outputs of the FlexTalk programme are this April 2025 report on the Seed Project and this February 2025 note on the role of standardisation and interoperability.