

Smart grid: An evolution that starts now  
*GE Energy hosts World Economic Forum  
as stakeholders discuss path forward for smart energy*

When it comes to implementing smart grid, there's no single answer that fits all situations and as utilities conduct pilot programs across the world, it's important to effectively communicate the objectives and results of those projects to consumers.

Those are among the findings discussed at a one-day smart grid workshop convened by the World Economic Forum (WEF) and hosted by GE Energy in Atlanta Nov. 9-10.

"There are a lot of drivers for smart grid," said Bob Gilligan, vice president for GE's digital energy business, part of GE Energy. "But when it comes to smart grid development, it's not going to be a big bang theory with instant development. Rather, this is going to be a series of investments over many years. The grid we're using now has been developed over a hundred years. Many of the components are reaching the end of their lifecycle. To add the modern automation and communication we'll need for a more intelligent, useful system for utilities and consumers, this is going to be an evolution that needs to start now. Consumers have an appetite for energy that continues to grow."

More than 50 smart grid stakeholders – including utilities, environmental groups, technology companies, energy consultants, university professors, and regulators– gathered at GE Energy's Atlanta headquarters to share ideas about how to propel smart grid more quickly.

"One size doesn't fit all when it comes to smart grid," said Mark Spelman, global head of strategy for Accenture, a partner with WEF. "We don't all start in the same place. If you think about where you are today in the world, there isn't a standard blueprint."

In summarizing the workshop discussion, Spelman said three big themes surround smart grid implementation: energy (including energy security and energy demand), climate change and power reliability.

The WEF's study ("Accelerating Successful Smart Grid Pilots") studied 90 smart grid pilots worldwide and concluded important takeaways in three time frames:

- Short-term: Lay the foundation for success. Policymakers and regulators must create the right conditions and standards for innovation. Meanwhile, utilities and their

partners must focus on creating stable technology while simultaneously educating consumers.

- Middle-term: Reshape the agenda and roll out proven technologies. Policymakers and regulators should align incentives and encourage private investment. Utilities and partners must share the results of pilot programs to make the business case for large scale rollouts
- Long-term: Change the model. Policymakers and regulators should reward utility innovation and encourage new business models. Utilities and partners should innovate around new business models and use data on consumer targets to drive new energy-use behavior throughout the public.

“There’s no easy button when it comes to smart grid,” Gilligan told attendees. “It’s not a product. It’s an evolution of technologies that combines automation, communication and information that will be implemented through big, complex infrastructures and enhanced over time. It isn’t a one-time thing and it isn’t the same with every utility.”

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