

# CREATING PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUCCESS

THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND HEALTH  
TRANSFORMATION

Lev Pedro

Emma Baylin

14 January 2020

**NCVO**  
CHAMPIONING  
VOLUNTARY  
ACTION

## Contents

---

Purpose of this document .....	3
Essential components of successful partnerships.....	5
Component 1: Building relationships.....	6
Component 2: Shared vision and values.....	8
Component 3: Principles of joint working.....	10
Component 4: Investment and resources .....	12
Component 5: Leadership.....	14
Models of partnership working.....	16
Challenges and ways to overcome them .....	19
Recommendations.....	23
Resources .....	24
Additional information.....	25
Acknowledgements .....	26

## Purpose of this document

---

This publication aims to help voluntary or public sector leaders build successful, sustainable and effective partnerships between public sector organisations and the voluntary sector.

NHS England and NHS Improvement commissioned NCVO to act as a learning partner on their voluntary community and social enterprise (VCSE) accelerator programme for six months in 2019–20. This involved the provision of funding and other resources to nine emerging integrated care systems (ICS) to help them to improve the role of the voluntary sector in the design and transformation of health and social care services.

This document summarises the findings of this work and highlights:

- the essential components for success
- models of voluntary sector partnership working
- challenges and ways to overcome them.

Each section provides links to examples, case studies and resources which can be used.

While this publication focuses specifically of the role of voluntary organisations in the new integrated care systems, we firmly believe that the components of success and the challenges are universal. The learning can therefore be applied to any area of public service delivery.

## Jargon busting – what the words and acronyms mean

- **Sustainability and transformation partnership (STP):** A partnership of commissioners and providers in an area working together to strategically plan health and social care delivery and integration.
- **Integrated care system (ICS):** A constituted entity that will replace STPs in all areas of England by 2021.
- **System:** The partnership operating at the geographical level of the STP/ICS.
- **Place:** Local borough or district level.
- **Neighbourhood:** The smallest and most local area that services are organised at.
- **Primary care network (PCN):** Collaboration of GP practices covering 30,000–50,000 people working towards integrated primary and community health services.

## Context – the VCSE Accelerator Programme

- The [NHS long-term plan](#) set the ambition that every part of England should be an [integrated care system](#) by 2021.
- The introduction of integrated care systems requires new ways of working.
- There is evidence that shows it has been difficult for voluntary organisations and social enterprises to engage with systems, and systems have reported it's difficult to engage with the sector or they don't know how to.
- The VCSE Accelerator Programme is helping to address this by testing and developing models of voluntary sector and social enterprise leadership groups/alliances in integrated care systems.
- The creation of these alliances encourages the sector to work in a coordinated way and provide the NHS with a single route of contact and engagement with the sector and communities.

## Essential components of successful partnerships

---

From our work with emerging partnerships, we have found that it is not so much the model or structure that emerges, but the process of reaching that model, and some key components that create success.

These essential components take time to develop.

Because of ongoing work pressures, it is easy to skip over getting these right.

Getting these in place at the outset avoids later problems, can save considerable time later and increases impact.

- [Building relationships](#)
- [Shared vision and values](#)
- [Principles for joint working](#)
- [Investment and resources](#)
- [Leadership](#)

## Component 1: Building relationships

---

### What works well

**‘Strong, robust relationships’** is the first thing that people cite when asked ‘what helped you succeed?’ in developing voluntary sector partnerships. This sounds simple, but when time and resources are tight, building relationships in a meaningful way is often overlooked.

People tell us that it is important to connect with colleagues outside of formal decision-making processes as well as within.

It is important to develop a culture and practice that enables relationships to build within the strategic decision-making landscape, creating shared experience on a personal and professional level. This can be particularly relevant where partners are based in different offices or different sectors making informal relationship-building more challenging.

### Likely positive impacts

When time is allowed for robust relationships to develop we see several positive impacts.

**Quick response** – People are more likely to prioritise answering the request of someone they have a connection with, leading to faster action.

**Increased opportunities** – When people can share experiences outside of the formal agenda, we see new innovative and creative problem-solving taking place, including better sharing of resources and greater impacts for people. Barriers are more easily overcome.

**Trust developed** – People start to develop more of a shared understanding of each other’s role in making that a reality. It enables a ‘one team’ approach to a shared agenda rather than working in ‘sector silos’.

### Example: Lincolnshire

#### Lincolnshire Voluntary Sector Engagement Team

Public sector colleagues perceive the sector as varied and complex, and difficult to navigate. Therefore, the Voluntary Sector Engagement Team (VET) was established to bring together various organisations and networks to fully understand what each organisation does and how the sector might achieve a cohesive and defined purpose in partnership with the emerging integrated care system (ICS). They wanted the sector to have a clearer voice and be a partner in the decision-making and delivery of health and care services in Lincolnshire.

VET formulated three key asks:

1. Agreed process to discuss the VET MoU with the statutory sector
2. Consideration of how to ensure VET is engaged with the statutory sector in taking the Long-Term Local Plan forward
3. Financial Support for VET – to match the contributions made from within the voluntary sector.

### Successes so far

- [VET online info portal](#) collaboratively developed
- Chair and Deputy Chair of VET have been invited to the Joint Working Executive Group (JWEG)
- VET asked to coproduce ICS Workforce development toolkit
- Stronger ongoing partnership between sectors

[Read the full case study on NCVO Knowhow](#)

‘The two-day learning event facilitated by NCVO was an invaluable opportunity to build our team and foster trusting working relationships.’

## Component 2: Shared vision and values

---

### What works well

Partners often overlook the development of shared vision and values because they assume these are already shared.

- It is essential to develop a shared understanding of ‘why are we here?’ and ‘where we are heading?’
- Sharing values helps people understand how and why they view things the way they do. This understanding can help develop relationships, dictate what or how information may need to be presented and play to the strengths of each partner in the room.
- It is important for all partners to own, adopt and live these agreements and to revisit them periodically to ensure they hold true.

### Likely positive impacts

Taking time to develop a shared vision and understand values, leads to a number of positive impacts. These include:

- stronger and more trusting **relationships** between partners
- partners being committed to achieving the same **outcome**
- a clearer sense of **direction** and **purpose**
- partners are more engaged and willing to take **action**
- better outcomes, therefore easier to measure **impact**
- being able to convey a clear and confident **message** to other stakeholders outside of the partnership.

### Example: Provider Alliance

With support from Support Staffordshire, a group of hospices built an alliance of end-of-life care providers, and secured participation from the local clinical commissioning group and public health.

### Enabling factors

- Focus on a topic that united everyone – gave way to clear direction and action
- Independent facilitation (from Support Staffordshire)
- NHS England & Improvement funding.



## Outcomes

- Service users had more confidence around issues relating to living and coping well with terminal illness, dying and bereavement
- A new, large network of people working together to improve end of life care from the voluntary sector including small organisations
- New, creative solutions.

[Read the full case study on NCVO Knowhow](#)

## Component 3: Principles of joint working

---

### What works well

As well as agreeing a [shared vision and values](#), partnerships that we followed also felt that it was vital to agree how the partnership will work together to achieve its shared goals.

A principles of joint working agreement, is more detailed than a memorandum of understanding and sets the expectations of conduct for all partners involved and enables the partnership to hold each other to account.

When developing these, conversations should cover what is expected from partners, timeframes, who has authority to make decisions on what, and what actions will be taken if partners are not upholding the agreement. These conversations can be tricky and it can be worth getting an experienced external facilitator to help navigate the discussion.

[NCVO advice on joint working agreements](#)

### Likely positive impacts

Developing and agreeing principles of joint working has many positive impacts, not just for those in the partnership, but for others wishing to work with and engage with them, such as public sector colleagues. This includes:

- developed and strong relationships
- clearer understanding of individual and partnership roles and responsibilities
- smooth and transparent decision making processes mutual respect and value across all parties
- more cohesive joint working with clear boundaries
- the creation of more stable and sustainable partnerships.

To realise these benefits, it is important all partners agree and sign up to them. Not having these in place often leads to conflict and the dissolution of partnerships.

### Example: Cross-sector documentation

A cross-sector collaboration in Salford coproduced documentation to underpin their relationships and engagement processes.

Salford Together (partnership of NHS organisations) and the local voluntary sector created a memorandum of understanding (MoU) through Salford Council for Voluntary Service. This gives the voluntary sector an equitable role in Salford Together as a key strategic partner in health, social care and wellbeing.

Partners then created a collaboration agreement which provides the tools to deliver the ambitions set out in the MoU, enabling partners to provide the best services and support for the people of Salford.

### **Enabling factors**

- Backfill funding for a partnership coordinator.

### **Outcomes**

- Positive approaches and relationships between sector partners and the health and social care sector, which have encouraged collaboration, built trust and enabled transformational work.

[Read the full case study on NCVO Knowhow](#)

‘Our partnership includes the voluntary sector because they are fundamental to our future success. The sector is embedded in communities and has the ability to bring insight, connection, capacity and innovation to what we do. This is essential in an era when we are joining up care to better meet the mental, physical and social needs of people.’ – NHS colleague

## Component 4: Investment and resources

---

### What works well

Charities have strengths and assets to bring to the strategic decision making table.

However, they are often funded solely to deliver frontline services, making it difficult to engage strategically in an equitable way.

Where the public sector has truly understood the value of the voluntary sector and shown commitment to the long-term vision, we have seen financial investment not just in service delivery but into strategic and coordinated development and engagement. This is particularly true of the partnerships that we followed.

### Likely impacts

Where investment is in place, it has enabled the sector to develop structures and processes to engage strategically on a more equitable footing. This can:

- aid engagement of smaller user-led groups
- enable more cohesive messaging
- lead to smoother representation processes.

The impacts of this include:

- clear, accessible processes for all stakeholders
- sustainability
- inclusion of rarely-heard voices
- sharing of power.

### Example: Secondment

The policy and engagement manager at [Bolton Community and Voluntary Services](#) undertook a one year, two day per week, secondment role to focus on strengthening connections and supporting different ways of working between NHS Bolton Foundation Trust and the local voluntary sector.

### Outcomes

- Increased awareness and understanding of the offer from the voluntary sector
- More opportunities for the sector to inform the design and delivery of services
- More opportunities for joint working

- A greater number of referrals from the division to the Community Asset Navigator programme
- Increased level of involvement of voluntary sector in small aspects of service delivery
- Increased offer of services to patients to improve health and wellbeing outcomes

[Read the full case study on NCVO Knowhow](#)

### Example: Investment in prevention

- The prevention workstream within the [West Yorkshire and Harrogate integrated care system](#) (ICS) secured funding (from NHS England & Improvement) to develop prevention services in all districts within the ICS area.
- Funding enabled the work to be accelerated and evidence to be gathered of the positive impact of prevention across the ICS area on reducing pressure on NHS and local authority services.
- Voluntary organisations led the initiatives.
- Sustainable partnerships were built at district and ICS level.
- This success led to further funding and investment successes.

[Read the full case study on NCVO Knowhow](#)

‘Without a financial investment by way of salary backfill from [name of public body], we would not have been able to progress this work so quickly and effectively.’ – Voluntary sector colleague

‘The funding from NHS England / NHS Improvement has been a massive enabling factor in creating capacity to move the ideas from the alliance forward at a pace.’ – Voluntary sector colleague

## Component 5: Leadership

---

### What works well

Strong leadership from statutory sector partners is essential in establishing the culture and practices that underpin effective partnership working with the voluntary sector.

- The value of the sector needs to be recognised and leadership needs to be mirrored at all levels of the system.
- Leaders need to lay out the vision for what is possible, the evidence for how to do it, and the flexibility in the structure to allow creativity and the trying of new things without a blame culture.
- We have seen amazing partnerships develop, culture change and strong impacts when leadership training is delivered cross-sector instead of in 'silos'.
- [System leadership](#) is an interesting model being used in some areas to encourage leadership at all levels (not just formal leadership roles).

### Likely positive impacts

- Culture change
- Clear understanding of value and contribution across sectors
- Stronger, more effective partnerships
- Improved relationships
- Greater achievements and impacts.

### Example: Voluntary sector advocacy role

Voluntary organisations in Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire became involved in planning a proposed new model of [frailty care](#). As a result, [Voscur](#) were able to present invaluable community insight. This resulted in Voscur being asked to advocate for the voluntary sector on the [STP](#) programme board. There was a commitment at management level in the [STP](#) to engage with voluntary organisations, including places on the programme board.

### Enabling factors

- A commitment, at management level within the STP, to engaging with voluntary organisations
- Close communication between voluntary sector reps on the board with support organisations
- Time and space being given in meetings to hearing the voice of the voluntary sector.

## Outcomes

- Voluntary sector advocates are now integral to the work on frailty in this area.
- Improved system thinking across a broader pathway than health, reflected in the emerging work streams for developing frailty services.
- Public engagement effectively builds on existing data and knowledge within VCSE sector
  - ie not asking people the same questions twice but learning from what we already know
  - this demonstrates the sector's commitment to Making Every Contact Count.

# Models of partnership working

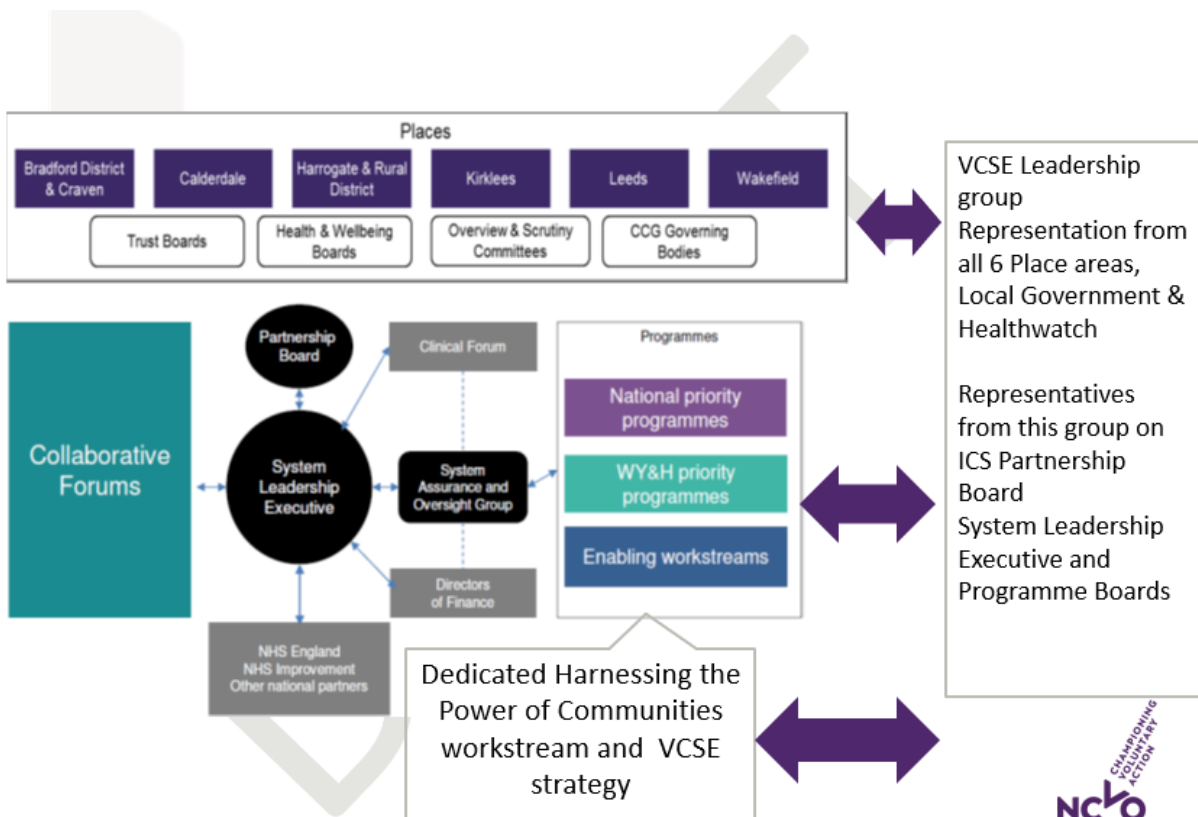
## Partnership structure

The partnership models developed in each area differed in structure, but all had some shared elements:

- creation of a **voluntary sector leadership group or alliance** (a group made up of voluntary organisations aiming to be a broker for the wider sector and a single point of contact for NHS colleagues)
- **voluntary sector representation** on public sector or cross-sector groups including the STP/ICS board
- a **mechanism for two-way engagement** with the wider voluntary sector and wider partners and structures
- a process for **feedback to the wider sector**.

These models provide a template for creating a clear, consistent and validated approach, maximising engagement, outcomes and impact across the geographical footprint of the ICS.

## Model: West Yorkshire and Harrogate





## Model: Lancashire and South Cumbria

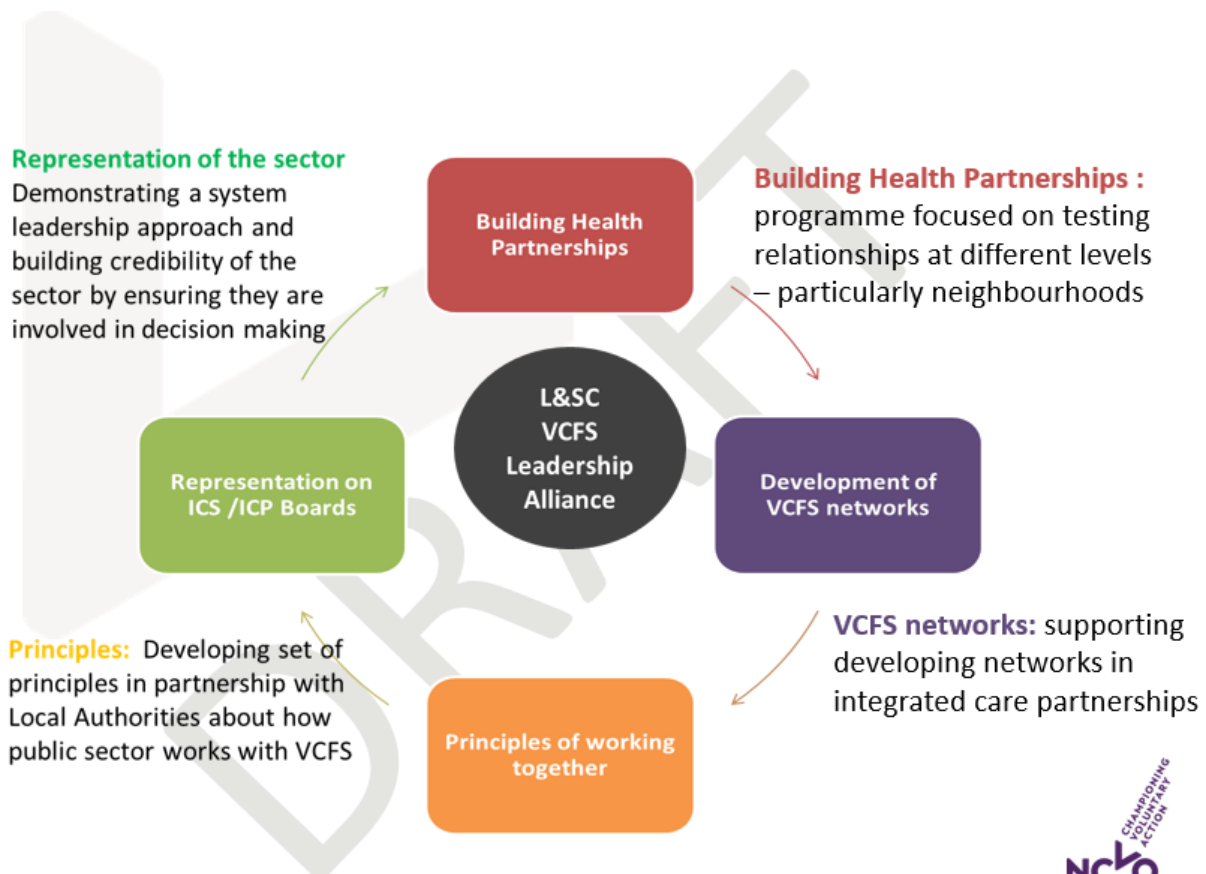
Lancashire and South Cumbria had a disjointed array of forums and engagement processes. With the increasing strategic role of the voluntary sector, there was a need to clarify and strengthen lines of accountability and channels of communication.

The establishment of voluntary sector leadership groups in each of five integrated care partnership (ICP) areas, each chaired by an elected representative, is creating a co-produced mechanism for transparent representation and voice.

Representatives of each of the five ICPs and other voluntary organisations across the STP area are included in the VCFS Leadership Alliance.

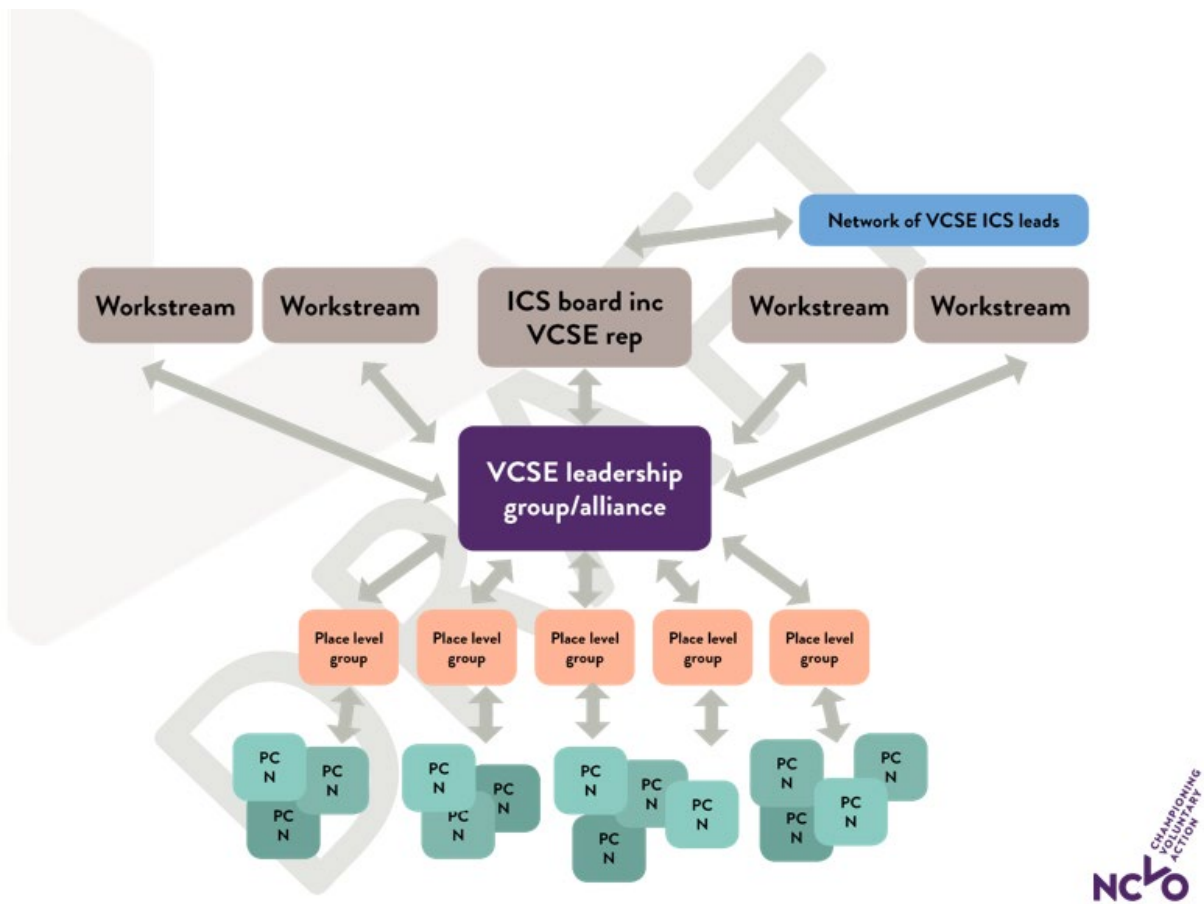
Outcomes were:

- A single point of contact for public sector leaders and partners into the sector
- An agreed process for election of reps, ensuring transparency and accountability as well as support and back-up for the representative themselves.



‘The voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) leadership groups provide a useful route of contact and engagement with the sector.’ – Public sector colleague

## Emerging NHS model - voluntary sector engagement



## Challenges and ways to overcome them

---

As well as the essential components, we identified some common challenges the partnerships faced.

### Representation and governance

It is vital that the voluntary sector is involved, engaged and represented within **strategic** decision making and system transformation.

Voluntary sector reps can bring **intelligence** not accessible to public sector bodies, can work **creatively** and **at pace**, and can present **new solutions** to problems.

There are a number of real and perceived challenges associated with this.

- Who is best placed to do this?
- Will the representative be there to promote their own organisation or represent the wider sector and community?
- How can we avoid conflicts of interest?
- How will the views of smaller groups and organisations be included?
- How will the voice of those most excluded be amplified?

These can be overcome by having:

- written terms of reference (ToR)
- open and transparent recruitment and selection process with a role description
- mechanisms in place to listen the views of the wider sector and to provide feedback
- more than one representative, for example a **sub**
- representatives of particular communities (interest/place) or workstreams
- **remuneration** to cover the costs of the representative attending meetings and any additional work as part of this role
- [a joint working agreement](#)
- a conflict of interest policy.

### Example: Inclusive governance structure

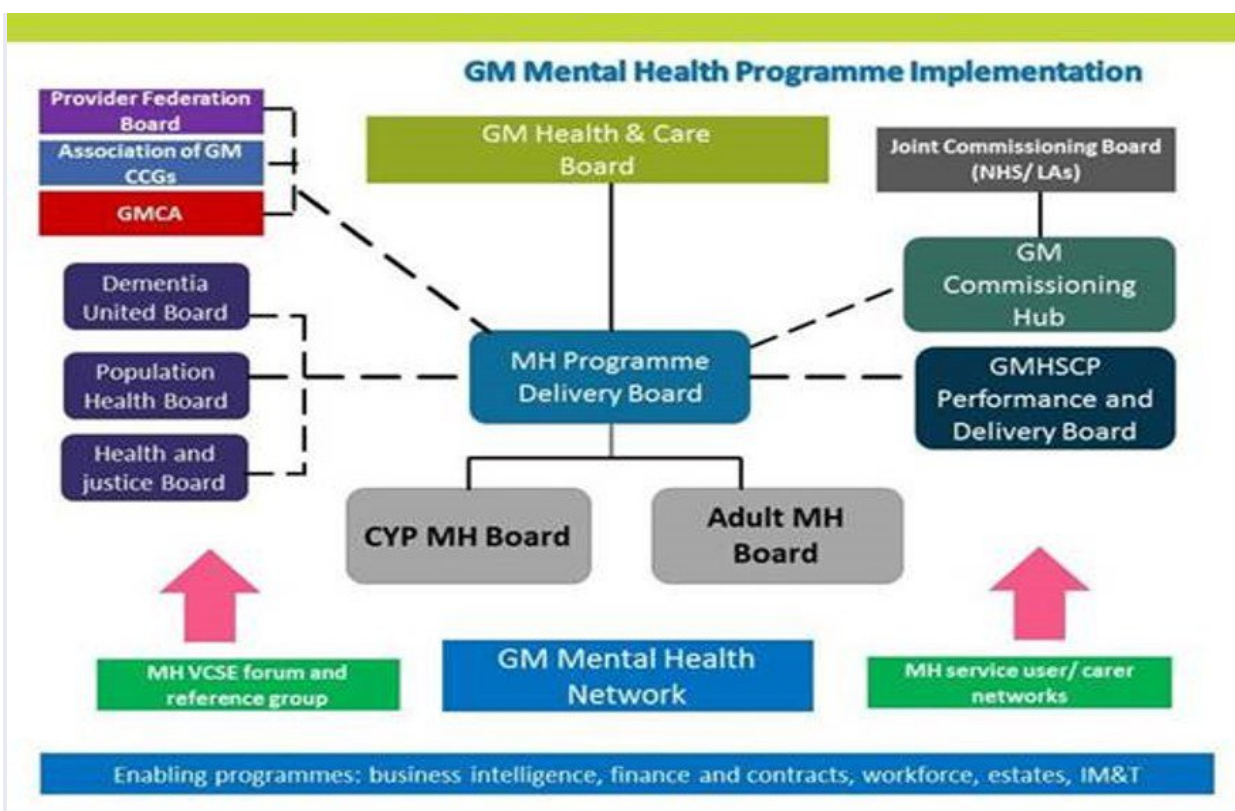
In response to an emerging governance structure, the voluntary sector in Greater Manchester gained meaningful and inclusive involvement in the governance structure of the mental health work stream.

### Enabling factors were:

- voluntary sector reps recompensed for their time
- a competitive and transparent selection process
- the voluntary sector genuinely seen as an integral part of the system.

### Key outcomes were:

- increased skill and capacity of sector leaders
- increased and consistent representation at all levels of planning and development
- consistent feed-in from wider sector and process for feeding back
- voluntary sector now seen as equal partners.



## Demonstrating impact to people and communities

In any venture that requires people to commit time, it is important to demonstrate **how it is making a difference** to the health, care and wellbeing of communities and people.

### Enabling factors

- [Shared vision](#) – Be clear on goals and how the work of the partnerships is going to achieve it.
- Use [measurement tools](#) to agree and deliver agreed outcomes. These work best if jointly and collaboratively developed, not imposed.
- **Play to the strengths** of the partners.

- **Align work** to the ICS/STP plan.
- **Demonstrate the value** of the partnership and the impact that working together is having on integrated care and the health and wellbeing of communities.
- **Communicate** the partnership work and its successes.

## Examples

- All accelerator sites are aligning their plans with the plans of the STP/ICS to help fully demonstrate the impact of the voluntary and social enterprise sector as a transformation partner.
- In **West Yorkshire and Harrogate**, voluntary sector reps oversee the ‘harnessing people and communities’ workstream and helped develop the voluntary sector strategy.
- **Cheshire and Merseyside Partnership** is developing a five-year plan that aligns with that of its integrated care system.
- **Lincolnshire** Voluntary Executive Team have a [web portal](#) and are developing an [outcomes framework](#) to demonstrate the impact their partnership makes.

## Culture change

Reaching and engaging with people across all sectors can change the culture of partnerships, and lead to better outcomes for people and communities.

Culture is one of the most frequently cited challenges to effective partnership working. A partnership can have agreed goals, but if the culture in which they are operating is not enabling work to achieve them, it will most likely be ineffective.

**Differing cultures** across sectors and **lack of real knowledge** or **understanding** and **value** of each other can contribute greatly to culture clashes.

## Enabling factors

- Make time at the start of a partnership to develop the [essential components](#), as well as [relationships](#) and working practices that influence culture.
- Make sure all partners in the system are signed up to the same [values and principles](#). This is enabled by [strong leadership](#) at each level of the structure.

## Key outcome

An environment, where all partners across sectors are working together toward the same goal.

‘If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got.’

– Henry Ford



## Recommendations

---

### Recommendation 1: Adopt the essential components

If you are a voluntary organisation or a public sector body wanting to increase partnership working and ensure that the strength of the voluntary sector is harnessed, we recommend that you adopt the **essential components** outlined above.

- Take time to build relationships
- Develop a shared vision and values
- Agree principles of joint working, with documentation
- Invest and bring in resources
- Build clear cross-sector leadership.

### Recommendation 2: Don't just adopt a model

Just adopting a particular model will not be enough. True system change and transformation needs to ensure that:

- the voluntary sector is and feels like an **equal partner**
- **governance structures** reflect the importance and value of the sector
- this becomes the default way of working **across your organisation** (not just one or two colleagues)
- **activity is aligned** across all sectors. Having a shared vision and values will help facilitate partnership working and support system transformation
- there is **senior level buy-in** from **all organisations** at **all levels of the system**.

## Resources

---

### NCVO Knowhow

- [Influencing health system change](#)
- [Joint working agreements](#)
- [Delivering public services](#)
- [Consortia](#)
- [Case studies](#) (health transformation)

### NHS England & Improvement

#### NHS England & Improvement Voluntary Partnerships Team

The Voluntary Partnerships Team delivers programmes that develop and maximise the contribution that the voluntary sector and volunteering have on services, communities and individuals and system transformation. Contact: [voluntarypartnerships@nhs.net](mailto:voluntarypartnerships@nhs.net)

#### [Transforming Healthcare Together](#)

A free support offer, jointly funded by NHS England & Improvement and the National Lottery Community Fund, equipping leaders to build the relationships needed to transform health and care systems. You can find out more about this work and sign up to the Practice Development Network.



## Additional information

---

### The NHS long-term plan and integrated care systems

The [NHS long-term plan](#) set the ambition that every part of England should be an [integrated care system](#) (ICS) by 2021.

It encourages all organisations in each health and care system area to **join forces**, so they are better able to **improve the health** of their populations and offer coordinated efficient services to those who need them. Health and care leaders will work to make that ambition a reality, whether in NHS acute or primary care, physical or mental health.

‘Integrated care systems will provide stronger foundations for working with local government and voluntary sector partners on the broader agenda of prevention and health inequalities.’

‘Every ICS will have a partnership board, drawn from and representing commissioners, trusts, primary care networks, and.....local authorities, the voluntary and community sector and other partners.’

#### What it says about the voluntary sector and volunteering

- A big shift from acute to community care
- Voluntary sector should be embedded in the leadership of ICSs
- Voluntary sector membership of new [NHS Assembly](#)
- Focus on addressing health inequalities
- Big increase in volunteering in the NHS

#### What the voluntary sector can do

Voluntary organisations and social enterprises have a key role supporting the delivery of the long-term plan as **transformation, integration and innovation partners**. We:

- **deliver services:** making up a significant proportion of health and care workforce, including volunteers
- **advocate:** for different communities and groups across systems (by condition, geography, protected characteristic)
- offer **expertise and flexibility:** to innovate and bring community assets into the health and care economy
- bring **credibility and trust:** the ability to support non-medical needs and join up services where the public sector cannot.

## Acknowledgements

---

### The areas we gathered insight from

#### Thank you

- [Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire](#)
- [Cheshire and Merseyside](#)
- [Greater Manchester](#)
- [Lancashire and South Cumbria](#)
- [Lincolnshire](#)
- [Norfolk and Waveney](#)
- [Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent](#)
- [Surrey Heartlands](#)
- [West Yorkshire and Harrogate](#)

**Thanks also to NHS England and NHS Improvement for funding this work.**

NCVO champions the voluntary sector and volunteer movement to create a better society.

We connect, represent and support over 15,000 voluntary sector member organisations, from the smallest community groups to the largest charities.

[publicservices@ncvo.org.uk](mailto:publicservices@ncvo.org.uk)