Top Tips

For influencing and working with the NHS as a VCSE organisation

Visit www.innovationunit.org/projects/health-equalities/ for more resources and information on the learning and support programme.

Innovation Unit
Creating impact
Reducing inequalities
Transforming systems

COMMUNITY FUND

About the Health Equalities Programme

As part of their Health Equalities programme, The National Lottery Community Fund has awarded £700,000 to support local areas to develop effective and sustainable partnerships between the voluntary and community sector, the NHS and local authorities to improve health and wellbeing, reduce health inequalities and empower communities. These partnerships have the potential to bring about significant change, promoting the role of the voluntary sector and the value of cross-sector partnerships.

The National Lottery Community Fund and the Innovation Unit are working together to connect and convene the Health Equality partnerships to generate and share learning, and communicate this learning to wider audiences. By sharing learning and insights relating to tackling health inequalities, we aim to support partnerships to build a legacy beyond their National Lottery funding and point towards longer-term systems change.

This document captures insights from the third learning event. Other products and information will be available here as we progress through the programme and accumulate more learning.

Working with the NHS:

Building credibility and influencing the health system as a VCSE Organisation

During the third learning event, Health Equality Development Grantees shared examples of influencing successes and working with commissioners. The main theme that emerged was around **developing long term quality relationships** over trying to secure immediate funding opportunities and using these relationships as platform to influence and secure senior level buy in. There was consensus that this approach takes time and can be especially challenging as people can change roles regularly in the statutory sector. This content is crowdsourced from the Learning Event 3 discussions between HEDG and experts with a wealth of experience in VCSE / NHS partnership working.

Focusing on the question:
How do we develop and maintain relationships with NHS colleagues and work with them to become agitators for change?

Build Trust

Be a reliable partner, prioritising the partnership and actions associated with it. Participants highlighted regular meetings, listening closely and thinking 'what can *I bring* to this partnership?' as key.

Expertise by experience

Focus on bringing the authentic voice of beneficiaries and showcase your insight and unique links to different communities. Value and demonstrate your ability to engage groups that the statutory sector can't.

Understand Risk Culture

Help statutory colleagues deal with the risks they are working with by remaining empathetic and transparent about risk and problem solve together.

Empathy

Relational Practice

Trust

Reframe conversations

Understand statutory colleagues' drivers and centre conversations around benefits: for their teams and for local communities. Focus on solutions and build on previous successes.

Make it easy

Simplify processes. Decode jargon, avoid exclusionary acronyms and remain transparent about how the different sectors operate.

Share Evidence

The reputation of the VCSE sector has grown since the Covid-19 pandemic. Sharing evidence, outcomes and track records of high quality delivery can influence the thinking of your partners.

Working with the NHS:

Practical tips for building relationships with system partners as a VCSE Organisation

In the 3rd Learning Event HEDG heard from Nick Dixon who was a Commissioning Manager working on the [Stockport Together Model](#), and Sophie Glinka, who was previously a Chief Officer of a medium size charity, The Bureau Glossop, and now works for the NHS.

Sophie spoke about her positive experiences working with the statutory sector, in particular with her local **commissioners**. She highlighted the importance of listening out for areas of **shared ambition,** emphasising **shared points of success** and approaching commissioners from a position of friendship. Both Sophie and Nick reflected that this **relational** approach takes **time**, resilience and often tenacity.

Hearing Sophie speak, four key insights emerged:

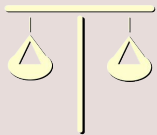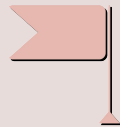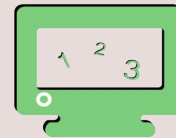| Build an equal, trusting, empathetic relationship	Manage expectations around risk & outcomes	Embed evaluation processes at the start	Standardised Outcome Frameworks
Sophie advocates friendship and transparency, carefully articulating how your work meets the current objectives of commissioners. Transparency can open the door for shared problem solving between commissioners and VCSEs.	Sophie recommends being transparent about barriers from the beginning. Only promise outcomes you can be confident on delivering - otherwise identify these not as outcomes, but as aspirations and be explicit that emergent learning will be an output either way.	Sophie spoke about giving funders and commissioners clarity over how the project will be evaluated at the beginning. Embed smooth data processes and clear standards of measurement early on, ensuring statistics can be easily accessed.	Sophie used a CRM system and asked commissioners to provide funding for it after it was established. She recommends being confident about your chosen outcomes framework and, where relevant, standardising this across projects.