**BNSSG VCSE Brokerage Framework**

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

**Last updated: October 2024**

**These will be updated regularly**

1. **What is the Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire Integrated Care System (BNSSG ICS)?**

The BNSSG ICS brings together partners from across the NHS, local government and VCSE sector to improve health and care outcomes for its population by focusing on prevention, reducing health inequalities and supporting social and economic development.

Within the ICS, the BNSSG Integrated Care Board (ICB) is a statutory organisation with responsibility for developing a plan for meeting the health needs of the population, managing the NHS budget within the ICS and commissioning health and services in the area.

The ICS also includes other partners with different responsibilities for commissioning and provision of services, including:

* six locality partnerships
* three councils
* two acute trusts
* one mental health trust
* community health provider Sirona
* GP federation One Care
* the VCSE sector and the BNSSG VCSE Alliance and
* integrated neighbourhood teams / primary care networks.

1. [**What is Healthier Together? - BNSSG Healthier Together**](https://bnssghealthiertogether.org.uk/about-us/)

* [Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust](http://www.awp.nhs.uk/)
* [Bristol City Council](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/)
* [Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board](https://bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/)
* [North Bristol NHS Trust](https://www.nbt.nhs.uk/)
* [North Somerset Council](https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/)
* [One Care](http://onecare.org.uk/)
* [Sirona care & health](https://www.sirona-cic.org.uk/)
* [South Gloucestershire Council](http://www.southglos.gov.uk/)
* [South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust](https://www.swast.nhs.uk/)
* [University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust](http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/)
* VCSE sector

1. **What is the VCSE sector?**

The BNSSG VCSE Alliance has decided that the standard term for the sector is VCSE: Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise. The VCSE Alliance describes the VCSE sector as follows.

VCSE means a Voluntary, Community or Social Enterprise organisation which has the following common features:

* **Beneficial and accountable to the community**: They have social objectives to benefit the community and are accountable to the community.
* **Formal**: They have a formal and recognisable structure that is described in a constitution or a formal set of rules. They are registered with the relevant register or regulator.
* **Non-profit making**: They do not distribute profits to owners or directors but reinvest them in the sustainability of the organisation or use them for the benefit of the community.
* **Self-governing**: They are truly independent in determining their own course, with at least three trustees or directors or management committee members (who are not related to each other and are not paid shareholders) and a bank account in its own name.
* **Independent**: They are separate from the state and private sector.
* **Supported through volunteering and embrace community action**: They involve a meaningful degree of voluntary participation through having, for example, a trustee board/committee, volunteers, and donations.
* **Non-party political.**

VCSE organisations may have several structures or forms – one of which must be in place for an organisation to join the VCSE Brokerage Framework.

* Registered charity
* Unincorporated association
* Charitable Incorporated Organisation
* Community business (company limited by shares with a clear community purpose and benefits)
* Community Interest Company limited by guarantee
* Community Interest Company limited by share (Schedule 2 with 100% asset lock only)
* Community Benefit or Industrial Provident Society
* Company limited by guarantee

1. **What is the focus of the BNSSG VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

The Framework is focused on the many aspects that affect health and wellbeing also known as the wider determinants of health. This includes things like inclusion, work, housing, education, money, air quality, safety, transport, social and community connections alongside health and care advice, support and services.

1. **Who can apply to join the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

Any VCSE organisation operating for over 12 months can apply if they meet the following criteria:

* A registered charity, unincorporated association, Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), Community business (company limited by shares with a clear community purpose and benefit),Community Interest Company limited by guarantee (CIC, the common form of social enterprises), Community Interest Company limited by share (Schedule 2 with 100% asset lock), Community Benefit or Industrial Provident Society, or company limited by guarantee.
* Have robust governance and sound financial management proportional to organisation size, as set out in the VCSE Brokerage Framework Quality Assurance requirements.
* Based in and/or already delivering services and conducting activities within Bristol, North Somerset or South Gloucestershire.
* Focused on at least one of the many aspects that affect health and wellbeing – including things like inclusion, work, housing, education, money, air quality, safety, transport, social and community connections alongside health and care advice, support and services.
* Be willing to collaborate with other organisations on the Framework.

We encourage all VCSE organisations, even the very smallest, to apply. The joining process has been intentionally designed to be proportional to size.

1. **Why should I join the VCSE Brokerage Framework? What’s in it for my organisation?**

For VCSE organisations, the VCSE Brokerage Framework offers the following benefits:

* Easier funding applications
* Fewer entry barriers to the public sector as the process for joining is proportionate to the size of your organisation
* Networking and relationship building with VCSE peers
* Skill and practice sharing
* Greater community voice in public sector decisions
* Collaborative system reform and service design

1. **What are the benefits for people and communities?**

* A range of wellbeing and health activities and support designed to meet the diversity of the population.
* Activities delivered by peers and organisations of the community.
* Trusted relationships wit local and connected VCSE organisations.

1. **What are the benefits for health programme managers?**

* Ability to reach diverse, quality assured VCSE organisations that are place, identity and practice based.
* A ready to go, robust, inclusive process.
* Health and wellbeing activities and support linked to programme and system outcomes.
* Ready made grant and contract templates.

1. **Can large national charities or organisations apply to join the Framework?**

Any VCSE organisation can apply provided they meet the criteria for joining and the quality assurance requirements relevant to their size. This includes being able to demonstrate that they are based in and/or already delivering services and conducting activities within BNSSG.

1. **What are the Quality Assurance bandings, and what do they mean?**

The Quality Assurance bandings relate to the size of your organisation as measured by your annual income. They determine the level of quality assurance evidence you will be required to submit proportional to your organisation’s size. The purpose of the Quality Assurance bandings is to help reduce barriers to participation for smaller organisations by making the requirements proportional to their size. The bandings are shown in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Organisation’s annual income** | **Band** |
| Up to £100,000 | A |
| £100,001 - £250,000 | B |
| £250,001 - £500,000 | C |
| £500,001 - £1,000,000 | D |
| More than £1,000,000 | E |

1. **My organisation only just exceeds the £100k annual income threshold for the first Quality Assurance banding. Will I still be required to meet the additional requirements for organisations with annual income over that amount?**

Yes. You need to be able to meet the requirements of the Quality Assurance banding for your organisation’s size, even if you only just fall within it.

1. **How do I apply for the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

Applications to join the Framework can be made by completing VCSE Brokerage Framework VCSE Application Forms on the Healthier Together website - [VCSE Brokerage Framework - BNSSG Healthier Together](https://bnssghealthiertogether.org.uk/staff-and-partners/voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-vcse/vcse-brokerage-framework/#module-6) You will also find a downloadable PDF of the application questions on the website too. Please read these before you start your application, so you can collect all the information you need before you start. There is no save function on the application forms. The whole process should take no longer than 30 minutes.

1. **What happens once I have applied to join the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

Once you have submitted your online application, the Brokerage Team will download the information from the Healthier Together website and check that all the information has been submitted. If there is anything missing we will contact you to discuss this. Every application to join the Framework is reviewed by the VCSE Assurance Panel, who meet monthly. Following the Panel’s recommendation the VCSE Brokerage Team will contact you to let you know the decision.

1. **What happens if my organisation fails to meet the requirements for joining the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

You will be offered feedback about your application and the Brokerage team will explain what you need to do to meet the requirements. Where relevant the Brokerage team may also signpost you to support available from other organisations on the Framework.

1. **What happens if there are changes to our organisation after joining the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

Once accepted onto the Framework, an organisation’s quality assurance evidence will last for five years. However, if an organisation has a change of circumstance that places it in a different band for quality assurance during this time, then the organisation must inform the VCSE Brokerage Framework team and supply the additional documentation required.

1. **What happens if a grant or contract award pushes our organisation into the next band for Quality Assurance?**

In cases where an organisation receives funding from a grant or contract award via the VCSE Brokerage Framework, then the VCSE Brokerage Team will prompt the organisation to provide additional Quality Assurance information as part of the awarding of the grant or contract.

1. **What sort of funding and investment is available through the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

Funding brokered through the Framework will be focused on improving wellbeing and health outcomes in communities. The intention is for the process and funding/investment made available through the VCSE Brokerage Framework to follow good practice. This means things like funding will be on a full-cost recovery basis, and multi-year, where possible.

1. **My organisation needs core funding to cover our admin costs. Will this be available through the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

The VCSE Brokerage Framework is focused on improving wellbeing and health outcomes in BNSSG. Funding agreements that are brokered through the Framework will therefore be restricted to specific activities and not for covering core admin and other costs. VCSE organisations making proposals should include the full costs of providing activities – known as full-cost recovery – which would include contributions to organisational sustainability.

1. **Other than funding, why else might the public sector in BNSSG approach VCSE organisations through the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

In addition to funding, public sector requests of VCSE organisation on the Framework might include:

* Proposals to provide community preventive activities.
* Data, insights and/or intelligence on a particular issue
* Co-production of new services.

1. **Am I able to apply to join the Framework during the 2024-25 test-and-learn pilot phase?**

Yes, VCSE organisations can apply to join the Framework at any point. During 2024 and early 2025 the intention is to test and evolve the VCSE Brokerage Framework through four investment opportunities before it becomes business-as-usual from April 2025. To participate, VCSE organisations need to apply to join the Framework.

In the case of partnership proposals, the lead partner needs to have joined the Framework and other partners involved will need to have joined the Framework at the time of award.

1. **What if I don’t want to join the Framework?**

If your organisation does not join the Framework then it will not be able to make proposals to deliver health outcomes through the Framework.

1. **What is the relationship between the BNSSG ICB VCSE Brokerage Framework and the BNSSG VCSE Alliance?**

The BNSSG VCSE Alliance was developed, with funding from the BNSSG ICB, during 2022 and 2023 and launched in January 2024. Building on VCSE engagement infrastructure at locality and local authority levels, the Alliance aims to:

* Encourage and enable the VCSE sector to work in a coordinated way to inform policy, strategy and decision making.
* Provide the NHS & health and social care colleagues with a simple route of contact, engagement, and links to community.
* Better position the VCSE sector to contribute to the design and delivery of integrated care.

The VCSE Alliance draws from communities of practice, of place and of identity to ensure it is as representative and diverse as possible. It operates on a distributed leadership model, with an Alliance Steering Group, an Alliance Ambassadors Group (with a representative group of leaders from across the sector representing the Alliance across the ICS networks and boards) and an Alliance Coordination Group. Further details about the Alliance can be found in its Terms of Reference.

The BNSSG VCSE Alliance is co-developing the VCSE Brokerage Framework with the ICB and its investment in developing new ways of working with the VCSE sector. The team is being hosted by the BNSSG VCSE Alliance this year. Organisations that join the Framework will be encouraged to also participate in the Alliance.

1. **If my organisation has joined the Alliance, why does it need to join the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

They are separate things. Joining the BNSSG VCSE Alliance will not give your organisation access to apply for opportunities with public sector partners that the Framework will broker.

1. **What are the aims of the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

The VCSE Brokerage Framework has been established as a response to the challenges of VCSE integration into the ICS, as identified during a series of engagement workshops in November and December 2023 entitled *‘Co-designing for Improved Health, Social Care and Wellbeing’.*

The aim is that the VCSE Brokerage Framework will help integrate thousands of VCSE organisations with public sector bodies in BNSSG ICS and offer a:

* fair and simple way for public sector managers within BNSSG ICS to engage diverse VCSE organisations, including micro / small, equalities-led and hyper-local VCSE organisations
* new route for investment in VCSE-led community activities that deliver health and wellbeing improvements
* standard, robust, inclusive process for requesting and assessing the very best proposals for community activities.

1. **Can our partnership join the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

In this period, while we co-design and test this new way of working, we are inviting individual organisations to join the Framework. For those in partnerships, the individual organisations should apply to the join the Framework.

1. **Will our partnership/collaboration be able to make proposals or applications for funding?**

In this period, while we co-design and test this new way of working, individual organisations on the Framework will be invited to make proposals to deliver health outcomes. Part of those proposals may involve other partners – those elements should be added to the proposal and budget, where appropriate. VCSE (and partners) proposals and responses will provide useful intelligence on partnership approaches and inform next steps.

After this period, when we establish the VCSE Brokerage Framework as an ongoing service, there may be specific Proposal Forms for partnerships and collaborations. We will need clarity about the types of partners and how quality assurance/due diligence applies to partners that may not be on the VCSE Brokerage Framework.

1. **My company is not VCSE but we could offer support – can we be on the VCSE Brokerage Framework?**

The VCSE Brokerage Framework is a development that aims to prioritise diverse VCSE organisations because they are not fully integrated into our health and care system.

In this period, while we co-design and test this new way of working, individual VCSE organisations on the Framework will be invited to make proposals to deliver health outcomes. Part of those proposals may involve other partners, which could include companies and/or non-VCSE organisations. In general, we expect proposals and delivery to be led by VCSE organisations and VCSE (and partners) proposals and responses will provide useful intelligence on partnership approaches and inform next steps.

After this period, when we establish the VCSE Brokerage Framework as an ongoing service, there may be specific Proposal Forms for partnerships and collaborations. We will need clarity about the types of partners and how quality assurance/due diligence applies to partners that may not be on the VCSE Brokerage Framework.