

VCSE Brokerage Framework: Information and Guidance for the Reducing Perinatal Mental Health Inequalities programme

Published date:	1 st December 2025
Deadline for clarification questions:	19 th December 2025 - midday
Deadline for proposals:	23 rd January 2026 – 5pm

Introduction

This document provides information and guidance for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations to make proposals to deliver activities to address the desired aims, objectives and outcomes of the Reducing Perinatal Mental Health Inequalities Programme.

This programme aims to address significant health inequalities experienced by some communities. Proposals for these priority communities are sought from diverse VCSE organisations. Funding from Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Integrated Care Board's (ICB) adult mental health budget has been made available to reduce Perinatal Mental Health Inequalities across BNSSG. In this context, the term 'perinatal' is defined as from conception until a child is 2 years old.

Things to note when developing your proposal

Please read the [VCSE Brokerage Framework guidance](#) before developing your proposal. **Your organisation must have been accepted onto the Framework (with or without conditions) or have an application in process to be eligible to submit a proposal.** Note that all Brokerage Framework conditions need to have been completed before an award can be finalised.

- All parts (the blue boxes) of the Proposal Form should be completed.
- Word limits – maximum word limits are included. We encourage organisations making proposals to be proportionate and use the number of words needed to answer the questions. Please don't feel that you need to reach the maximum word count if you can respond with fewer words. Additional words over the limit will not be considered.
- Proposals can be for new or a continuation of existing activities. We acknowledge that, for new activities, a longer implementation/set-up time may be needed.
- Explanations and guidance are shown in *italics* throughout the Proposal Form.
- For help when completing the proposal, you should attend the Engagement Event(s) and/or note the deadline for clarification questions (see Timeline below).
- Partnerships and collaborations – if your proposal specifically includes other partners, please include an explanation about your relationship, how the work will be allocated between partners, and clearly outline in the Proposed Budget template how the resources will be allocated between partners.
- Proposed Budget – please refer to the guidance notes in the Proposed Budget template and make sure all parts (the blue boxes) of the template are completed. Your completed Budget should be submitted with your completed Proposal Form. Please note that, if your proposal is recommended for award, additional financial documents/information will be needed to complete the economic and financial standing checks – this is described in the Proposed Budget template.

About the Reducing Perinatal Mental Health Inequalities programme

Proposals are sought from VCSE organisations, or partnerships of VCSE organisations, to:

- Engage with local communities to educate and promote awareness of perinatal mental health. This will include advising women and birthing people¹ on how to recognise when they need support and signposting to appropriate local agencies.

This community engagement and education could also include:

- Developing new or extending existing local parent and baby groups and perinatal mental health groups that are specifically for each of the underserved communities identified in the most culturally appropriate and geographically appropriate locations to maximise participation.
- Offering one to one support to women and birthing people when engaging with perinatal mental health services.

Current evidence identifies that women and birthing people from the following communities are underserved within health commissioning in BNSSG and are the priorities for this programme:

- Women and birthing people racialised as Black and Brown
- Asian women and birthing people
- Women and birthing people of mixed heritage
- Asylum Seekers, Refugees, migrated women and birthing people
- Women and birthing people within the Gypsy Roma Traveller community
- Women and birthing people with experience of the care system.

To ensure that all priority communities are served, proposals of up to £30,000 per annum for up to 3 years are sought. It is noted that some of these priority communities may intersect, and we are open to proposals that best serve the community. It is expected that the range of awards will cover all the priority communities.

Evidence Resources

The rationale for the approach is based on the following evidence, resources and local BNSSG data and insights:

Resource	Link
2025 MBRRACE Report	See Appendix 1
Breaking Barriers report	See Appendix 2
ICB Data – Equity of Access in BNSSG Specialised Perinatal Community Service (AWP)	See Appendix 3
Health & Social Care Committee report on Black Maternal Health	See Appendix 4
The Five x More Black Maternity Experiences Report	See Appendix 5

¹ 'Birthing people' is a standard term used by the NHS in our local system to be inclusive.

Tackling Maternal Health Inequalities in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities	See Appendix 6
Evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study - resources available to mothers who experienced out-of-home care in childhood	See Appendix 7
Addressing mental health issues among migrant and refugee pregnant women: A call for action	See Appendix 8
Logic Model Reducing Perinatal Mental Health Inequalities	See Appendix 9

The programme acknowledges that to achieve the aims of the programme, it will need to engage with organisations that may not already be working in Perinatal Mental Health, in order to subsequently reach parts of our population that are not currently accessing Perinatal Mental Health services.

To support this aim, upskilling and knowledge in Perinatal Mental Health will be available for VCSE organisations via:

- Training sessions in Perinatal Mental Health provided to all organisations awarded a grant
- A Community of Practice forum hosted by Health Innovation West of England
- Joining the BNSSG Perinatal & Infant Mental Health Integration team and network
- Oversight of grants through the BNSSG Local Maternity & Neonatal System Equity and Equality board

There are also resources that have been created by Bristol Family Hubs listing the Parent and Infant Emotional Wellbeing Support services in BNSSG here: [Health Visiting: Getting support with your family's emotional wellbeing – Children and Young People's Services](#)

Programme aims and objectives

In order to address health inequalities, the Reducing Perinatal Mental Health Inequalities programme aims to:

- Increase awareness of perinatal mental health particularly within the most underserved communities in BNSSG.
- Increase access to perinatal mental health services of women and birthing people from the most underserved communities in BNSSG.
- Improved equity of outcomes for those racialised as Black and Brown and those marginalised communities. Please refer to Appendix 9 for further details of the outcome model of the programme.
- Ensure women and birthing people racialised as Black and Brown and from marginalised communities have more trusted relationships with maternity and perinatal mental health services.

Outcomes, outputs, measures and evaluation

Please see Appendix 9 for a Logic model of outcomes for this project.

Related systems outcomes

Delivery of the Reducing Perinatal Mental Health Inequalities programme will also contribute to the [Healthier Together system outcomes framework](#):

- Increasing population healthy life expectancy across BNSSG and narrowing the gap between different population groups (POP1)
- Reducing early deaths from preventable causes in the communities which currently have the poorest outcomes (POP2)
- Improving everyone's mental wellbeing (POP5)
- Increasing the proportion of people who report that they are able to find information about health and care services easily (SERV7)
- Increasing the proportion of people who report that they are able to access the services they need, when they need them (SERV8)

In addition, the programme will contribute to the four Integrated Care System (ICS) aims:

- Improving population health outcomes
- Tackling health inequalities
- Enhancing productivity and value for money
- Supporting social and economic development in the ICS

Reporting

Frequency and methods of reporting will be agreed with the VCSE organisations that receive awards.

What may be funded?

Funding is available to deliver the Reducing Perinatal Mental Health Inequalities programme in line with the aims and objectives outlined in this document.

Funding is available for programme costs, including staffing, training, venues, and technology, and reasonable related overheads.

What cannot be funded?

This funding is not for large capital spends or anything that does not support the direct provision outlined in this document.

Funding Mechanism

Funding for this programme will be awarded via an NHS Grant Agreement. Under a grant agreement an NHS Integrated Care Board provides financial support to a voluntary sector organisation for an area of its work. By contrast, the NHS Standard Contract enables the purchase of specific clinical services from an organisation. A grant agreement may not impose an obligation to provide services but can require the grantee to use the money towards a particular project or service and set out other terms on which the grant is made. This funding mechanism has been determined as the most appropriate for this programme due to the nature of community engagement work being requested.

Changes in ICB Commissioned support for Perinatal Mental Health

It should be noted that this programme of work is the beginning of a new and innovative approach from the ICB in commissioning mental health support for women and birthing people in the perinatal period. This means that there are changes in the current contractual arrangements held by the ICB. Those changes and any service users that may be affected will be managed directly between incumbent mental health providers and commissioners.

Which organisations can make proposals?

Proposals must be from VCSE organisations based and/or working in BNSSG and that have either been accepted onto the VCSE Brokerage Framework (with or without conditions) or have an application in process. We especially welcome proposals from small/micro VCSE organisations that have built strong, trusting relationships within their local communities.

If your organisation has not yet applied to join the VCSE Brokerage Framework we encourage you to do this as soon as possible. Applications must be made before the proposal deadline (outlined later in this document). The application forms can be found here: [VCSE Brokerage Framework - BNSSG Healthier Together](#).

How proposals will be evaluated and scored

The proposal form includes a standard set of questions that are given weightings and feed into the following evaluation themes. Details of the weighting of each theme is included in the proposal form.

Evaluation themes	Weightings
Ability to serve the community	5%
Improving access and reducing health inequalities	30%
Integration, collaboration and connections	10%
Quality, improvement and innovation	35%
Social Value	10%
Realistic costing and value for money	10%

These evaluation themes are based on procurement practice and regulations, including the Provider Selection Regime, Procurement Act 2023 and the ICB's Standing Financial Instructions, including the Grants and Contracts Standard Operating Procedures.

Evaluation of the proposals will be facilitated by the Brokerage Team and an Evaluation Panel will be chaired by the programme manager/majority budget-holder and will comprise ICS and VCSE experts related to the specific wellbeing/health programme. Declaration of interest processes will be followed.

All evaluated questions will be scored on a scale of 0 to 4, as follows.

Assessment	Interpretation	Score
Deficient	A significantly deficient answer, unanswered or unacceptable response.	0
Limited	A limited answer that does not meet the stated requirement or one that provides little detail or evidence.	1

Acceptable	An acceptable answer meeting the stated requirement with a sufficient level of detail and evidence.	2
Good	A good answer, with a comprehensive level of detail and strong evidence.	3
Excellent	An excellent answer, exceeding the stated requirement with exceptional detail and evidence and/or one that is likely to result in increased quality, improved patient experience or innovation.	4

Evaluation panel members will score independently. After all scores are collated by the Brokerage Team, the Evaluation Panel will discuss and moderate scores. Any outstanding Quality Assurance conditions or notable points will also be considered by the panel.

Depending on the programme and VCSE proposals, the panel will discuss the range of awardable proposals, how they meet the overall programme aim/objectives/outcomes and note potential award conditions and/or changes.

After VCSE proposals are evaluated and recommended for awards by the Evaluation Panel, financial checks² will be undertaken by the ICB (or accountable body) to ensure that the recommended grant award(s) can be made with confidence and minimal risk to public funds. VCSE organisations will be asked to provide the following financial information so that financial checks can be completed:

- Financial statements/accounts for the preceding financial year, depending on the timings of the financial cycle. These may be audited, independently examined or otherwise, if audit is not applicable.
- Financial statement/cashflow for the most recent financial year. This may be a set of management accounts or an organisational budget, depending on how your organisation manages its finances.
- Projection or forecast for the current financial year, particularly the year in which an awarded grant/contract will be implemented.

VCSE organisations have the **option** to provide this information at the point of submitting the proposal and budget or at a later stage after the evaluation panel makes recommendations. In any case, financial checks will be undertaken only for those organisations whose proposals have been recommended for award. In some cases, discussion(s) about specific aspects of a VCSE organisation's financial management may be needed.

Following the completion of financial checks, the programme manager/majority budget-holder will coordinate the process of finalising grant agreements, as well as communication and implementation.

VCSE organisations making proposals should be aware that the possible outcomes of the evaluation process are full award, partial award, enhanced award, or no award.

² The economic and financial standing checks enable the ICB to assess the level of risk associated with the awarded grant/contract in your organisation. The checks involve review of your organisation's documents and may involve direct conversation so that the ICB can understand more of how your organisation manages finances.

Financial information

Total fund:	The total fund is £540,000 (£180,000 per annum x 3 years).
Source of funds:	Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB)
Duration of funding:	3 years

The contracting method for the Reducing Perinatal Mental Health Inequalities programme will be through grants.

Grant agreements will be finalised as soon as possible after financial and economic checks have been completed. Terms and conditions, including the payment schedule and reporting requirements, will be included in the grant agreement. As the VCSE Brokerage Framework aims to include smaller VCSE organisations, and we know that cash flow can sometimes be challenging, the intention is that an element of the award will be transferred up front when the grant agreement is finalised.

Indicative Timeline

1 st December	Invitation for proposals opens
16 th and 18 th December	Engagement Events and Q&A
19 th December - midday	Deadline for clarification questions
23 rd January 2026 – 5pm	Deadline for proposals
By 27 th February 2026	Evaluation scoring by panel members
w/c 9 th March 2026	Evaluation panel meeting
March 2026	Notification of decision
April 2026	Mobilisation and communications
May 2026	Anticipated commencement of delivery

Dates and actions are subject to change; if changes happen, the Brokerage Team will update organisations on the framework and other stakeholders.

When the Brokerage team receives your completed proposal form, they will check to ensure all the required information has been provided and send an acknowledgement of receipt.

Notification and feedback

Following the Evaluation Panel meeting, all organisations who submit proposals will be provided with notification of whether their proposal has been successful or not. Feedback will be offered to all organisations that make proposals, upon request to the Brokerage team.

Further guidance and support

For help when completing the proposal, please attend the Engagement Event(s) and/or contact the Brokerage team via proposal@bnssgvcsealliance.org within the clarification question period (outlined above). Answers will be provided on the Healthier Together website on a weekly basis, up until the deadline for clarification questions.

Please note that the Brokerage Team will be unable to provide any updates on progress with your proposal once the proposal submission deadline has passed and the Evaluation Panel is reviewing applications received.

Your feedback about this process

We welcome feedback on the process which will be used to further refine the VCSE Brokerage Framework. Please share your experience of participating in or using the Framework by completing our feedback form here - [VCSE Brokerage Framework feedback form - BNSSG Healthier Together](#).

Appendices

[Appendix 1 -2025 MBRRACE Report](#)

[Appendix 2 - Breaking Barriers report](#)

[Appendix 3 - ICB Data – Equity of Access in BNSSG Specialised Perinatal Community Service \(AWP\)](#)

[Appendix 4 - Health & Social Care Committee report on Black Maternal Health](#)

[Appendix 5 - The Five x More Black Maternity Experiences Report](#)

[Appendix 6 - Tackling Maternal Health Inequalities in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities](#)

[Appendix 7 – Evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study - resources available to mothers who experienced out-of-home care in childhood](#)

[Appendix 8 - Addressing mental health issues among migrant and refugee pregnant women: A call for action](#)

[Appendix 9 – Logic Model Reducing Perinatal Mental Health Inequalities](#)