

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT FOR THE BEDFORDSHIRE & LUTON VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Consortium has come together as the vehicle for developing and leading on sustainable infrastructure for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors in Bedfordshire & Luton.

2. Name

- 2.1 The Consortium shall formally be known as The Bedfordshire & Luton Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Consortium and, for profile purposes, shall be known as The Voluntaryworks Consortium. The Consortium's website address will be *www.voluntaryworks.org.uk*.

3. Overall Vision and Mission

- 3.1 **Vision** – A vibrant, effective, sustainable and inclusive third sector where all individuals and communities are empowered to play a full part in local voluntary and community action.
- 3.2 **Mission** – To provide effective support services to third sector organisations; enabling them to develop their capacity to deliver quality services that meet the needs of their communities.

4. Overall Functions of the Consortium

In order to deliver this vision, the following functions will be undertaken:

- 4.1 To promote awareness and understanding of the roles of the Consortium and its constituent members across the sector and within other statutory, private and public agencies.
- 4.2 To work collaboratively to make full and best use of infrastructure resources.
- 4.3 To seek to develop a stronger representational voice for the sector by working in partnership, thereby increasing recognition by other sectors.
- 4.4 To identify and respond to opportunities and threats facing the sector.
- 4.5 To seek to achieve best practice and continuously improve the quality of services delivered through the sector, together with the selection and adoption of appropriate techniques to measure the quality and impact of services.
- 4.6 To ensure that equality and diversity issues are addressed throughout the Consortium's work.
- 4.7 To identify gaps, shortfalls and insecurity in current structures and to reach agreement on ways of tackling them, whether by developing and transforming existing structures and/or by developing new solutions.
- 4.8 To build partnerships with funders to secure stable solutions to fill those gaps and reduce insecurity in organisations that are working well.
- 4.9 To establish protocols and mechanisms for joint working that will allow a 'holistic' approach to be taken and innovation to be nurtured.

- 4.10 To co-ordinate and prepare a needs-led Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP), Strategic Plan, Business Plan and action-based Delivery Plans.
- 4.11 To seek endorsement of these Plans by the widest possible cross-section of stakeholders, including voluntary and community sector bodies, support agencies, commissioning bodies and likely funders.
- 4.12 To develop investment proposals for these Plans as required.

5. Membership of the Consortium

- 5.1 Membership of the Consortium is open to third sector agencies based in Bedfordshire & Luton that provide infrastructure services and support to voluntary organisations, community groups, social enterprises, volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers. Organisations must be able to demonstrate that they provide at least three of the five following services:
 - 1. the organisation pro-actively identifies needs in the local community and facilitates improvement in service provision to meet those needs;
 - 2. the organisation assists local voluntary and community organisations to function more effectively and deliver quality services to their users, members and constituents;
 - 3. the organisation facilitates effective communication or networking and collaboration amongst local voluntary and community organisations;
 - 4. the organisation enables the diverse views of the sector to be represented to external bodies, developing and facilitating structures that promote effective working relationships and two-way communication;
 - 5. the organisation enhances the sector's role as an integral part of local planning and policy-making.
- 5.2 Organisations wishing to apply for membership of the Consortium will be able to download information from the Consortium's portal website. They should complete an Application Form outlining basic contact and organisational information, describe how the organisation meets the criteria in 5.1 above and state the level of work dedicated to such support.
- 5.3 Membership applications will be dealt with by the Accountable Body and decided upon by the Chairperson following consultation with members. Where there is no consensus on the application or where clarification is required the application will be discussed at the next Consortium meeting. The applicant will also be invited to attend the meeting.
- 5.4 The Consortium may co-opt organisations to advise it. They shall have a right of attendance at Consortium meetings but shall not be eligible to vote on any matters so decided.
- 5.5 Each member shall be eligible to have one vote in any decisions where a proposal is put forward for decision. Co-opted organisations shall not be eligible to vote.
- 5.6 Members of the Consortium may resign by advising either the Consortium's secretariat or other Consortium members, in writing, of their wish to do so.
- 5.7 Contact details for members and co-opted organisations will be published on the *voluntaryworks.org.uk* portal website and made available on request.

6. Stakeholder Engagement

- 6.1 The consortium will seek to be as inclusive as possible by supporting a process that allows continuous feedback from the grassroots up, promoting inclusivity, meaningful representation, flexibility and clarity of thought and presentation by engaging with stakeholders within and out with the sector. The Consortium will adopt a Marketing and Communications Strategy.

7. Members' Commitments

Consortium members will:

- 7.1 Provide a named representative that can authoritatively represent their interests and take decisions.
- 7.2 Ensure that the representative, or a named substitute, regularly attends meetings whenever possible. Members will submit apologies if they are unable to attend a meeting.
- 7.3 Provide any information agreed and requested by the Consortium within agreed time scales and meet any other commitments made to stakeholders or the sector by the Consortium.
- 7.4 Recognise the individuality of each member and the constraints within which they must work.
- 7.5 Focus on the development of services and matters of relevance to the sector as a whole/ majority.
- 7.6 Raise awareness of the Consortium.
- 7.7 Report progress and issues back to their individual Management Committees/Boards, relevant staff and their membership.
- 7.8 Treat any information received with due sensitivity and respect any confidences.

8. Accountable Body

- 8.1 Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire will act as the Accountable Body for the Consortium and will undertake the following:
1. Ensuring that all funding applications for the Consortium's activities are properly prepared, in accordance with any relevant guidance; that there are clear budgets, outputs and outcomes agreed by the Consortium and that applications for funding are submitted to Capacity Builders (or other funders) on time.
 2. Contracting with Capacity Builders and other funders on behalf of the Consortium and taking responsibility for all associated risks.
 3. Setting up and maintaining quarterly monitoring, reporting and claiming procedures for projects and Consortium members, ensuring a full audit of activities is maintained.
 4. Ensuring the effective management of the Consortium's funds, including the processing and payment of claims from Consortium members and the preparation of claims to funders on behalf of the Consortium.
 5. Monitoring the progress of projects being delivered by the Consortium.

6. Undertake reporting procedures as required by Capacity Builders, other funders and the Consortium, ensuring the monitoring and evaluation of the Consortium's Strategic, Business and Delivery Plans.
 7. Management and audit of the Consortium's funds through restricted fund(s) within the accounts and financial management controls of Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire.
 8. Providing an effective secretariat for the Consortium, including the arrangement of Consortium meetings and the distribution of minutes and agendas.
 9. Making arrangements for, and conducting, the election of the Chairperson.
- 8.2 The Accountable Body may over-ride decisions made by the Consortium where these are contrary to the terms and conditions of grants, guidance notes or other contracts entered into with a funder (including Capacity Builders) on behalf of the Consortium. All such decisions will be reported to the Consortium.
 - 8.3 In the event of a disagreement between the Accountable Body and the Consortium both parties will attempt to settle the disagreement by arbitration and the appointment a mutually agreed independent third party.
 - 8.4 The Consortium may review the appointment of the Accountable Body at the last meeting in the financial year. The Accountable Body shall assume office from the first day of April in each year until the 31 March of the following year.

9. Election and Role of Chairperson

- 9.1 The Consortium will elect one of its Members' representatives (other than the Accountable Body) to act as Chairperson of the Consortium who will undertake the following:
 1. Chairing of Consortium meetings and stakeholder events.
 2. Building trust amongst Consortium members and resolving any tensions and conflict that may occur.
 3. Representing the Consortium at any East of England VCS Infrastructure Consortia Forums.
- 9.2 The Chairperson will be elected at the last meeting in the financial year and will assume office from the first day of April in each year until the 31 March of the following year.
- 9.3 If the elected Chairperson is not available to chair a meeting, the Consortium may appoint one of its Members' representatives (including the Accountable Body) to act as Chairperson.

10. Operating Principles

The Consortium will, at all times, seek to operate in an inclusive manner. It will:

- 10.1 Determine appropriate secretariat arrangements that support inclusivity, effective communication and good practice in administration of the Consortium's business
- 10.2 Work through any appointed Strategic Development Officer or secretariat.

- 10.3 Work through any Implementation Groups or other sub-groups working on specialist areas. Membership of such groups may include colleagues drawn from Consortium member organisations and, where appropriate, other stakeholders.
- 10.4 Meet regularly during the year and produce a schedule of meetings well in advance.
- 10.5 Organise meetings in ways that allow all members to contribute to agenda setting, ensure full accessibility to all its meetings etc. and strive to circulate agendas and other papers at least five working days in advance.
- 10.6 The quorum shall be two or the nearest number to one third of the Consortium's membership eligible to vote.
- 10.7 Attempt to work by consensus, but recognise they do not have the power to commit an individual member organisation to a course of action that it does not wish to take.
- 10.8 Work together on collaborative funding bids. Where there is open competition for Capacity Builders funding programmes the Consortium will first decide whether there should be a collaborative application by the Consortium or enable members to make individual applications.
- 10.9 Adopt and implement protocols for the Consortium on, for example, collaboration, conflict resolution, complaints, and representation and accountability.

THIS PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT IS SIGNED, FOR AND ON BEHALF OF OUR RESPECTIVE ORGANISATIONS, BY ALL MEMBERS OF THE CONSORTIUM:

Wendy Anderson-Welsh
Chief Officer
Bedford Race Equality Council

Jon Boswell
Director of HAPPEN
Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity

Martin Trinder
Chief Officer
**Community & Voluntary Service
Mid and North Bedfordshire**

Everton Blake
Executive Director
Voluntary Action Luton

John Gelder
Director
**Voluntary and Community Action
South Bedfordshire**

Gerry Sansom
Manager
Volunteer Centre Bedford