

Voice4Change England

Consultation Response to Question 9

Supporting a Stronger Civil Society: An Office for Civil Society consultation on improving support for frontline civil society organisations

Submitted to the Office for Civil Society

Deadline 25th November 2010

Preface

Voice4Change England want to see the new OCS strategic partners programme predicated on a joint ownership model between Government and VCS to help implement the Government strategy. Based on a set of founding principles including involvement of a diverse group of stakeholders and incorporating accountability and transparency of the functions to all delivery partners, the joint ownership model will offer OCS a range of national partners that have reach to diverse sectors. The members would be trusted with the legitimacy for their work through open, transparent governance and accountability to their membership. The model suggested by Voice4Change England in this response outlines how government needs to build a new way of working with the VCS - a joint ownership / co-production approach that lends itself to shared responsibility and mutuality whilst respecting different roles and accountabilities.

BME VCS national representation in the strategic partners programme is imperative to help support BME voluntary and community organisations to seize the opportunities that the Big Society agenda and 'Building a Stronger Civil Society' presents.



Voice4Change England response to the Question 9 of the Supporting a Stronger Civil Society consultation

1 About Voice4Change England

- 1.1 Voice4Change England (V4CE) is a national support organisation for the Black and Minority Ethnic voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (BME VCS). We are a leading voice to inform the formulation of public policy and to influence practice that has a direct effect on the development, delivery and impact of BME voluntary, community organisations and social enterprises (VCOs). **We support the sector to build its capacity and secure resources so it can increase its ability to meet the needs of disadvantaged communities. By engaging and consulting with a wide range of organisations at the national, regional and local level, we provide an informed, authentic voice of the BME VCS.** We aim to develop a mutual understanding between the BME VCS and government to ensure policies are responsive to BME communities' needs and aspirations, including through our role as a Strategic Partner of the Office for Civil Society.

2 About the BME VCS

- 2.1 The BME VCS plays a key role in tackling race inequalities through a range of activities including: cultural, social and economic support programmes for younger, older and disabled people; advocacy and advice on legal issues, immigration, race equality and equal opportunity in employment issues; health services including support programmes on mental health issues and to help communities access mainstream health provision; welfare and economic support services; supplementary schools education and training; and day care community centres. According to research conducted for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation¹, **BME organisations meet the needs of BME communities 'to a much greater extent than the voluntary sector as a whole.'** They are able to reach communities that others cannot and do not reach and combine creativity, flexibility and commitment to meet the changing needs of BME communities. They also play an active role in advocating changes in the policy and practice of generic service providers.

3 Supporting a Stronger Civil Society: consultation on question 9

- 3.1 We welcome the opportunity to respond to the question 9 of the consultation 'Supporting a Stronger Civil Society' which asks: **'how can central Government best work with national infrastructure to support and deliver the Big Society?'**
- 3.2 We are pleased to see that Government recognises the important role of the civil society 'in supporting people; helping people find a voice and in shaping and delivering better public services.' We also support the Government's strategy for voluntary and community groups, charities and social enterprises

¹ Mcleod M, Owen D & Khamis C., 2001, Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations: their role and future development in England and Wales, Policy Study Institute for Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

'Building a Stronger Civil Society' (the Government strategy) and accept its invitation to help build the Big Society whilst tackling a huge challenge in reducing the structural public sector deficit. **In response to question 9, we offer suggestions for how the *implementation* of this strategy could be supported by national infrastructure organisations and the relationship they may have with central Government in general and with the Office for Civil Society (OCS) in particular to help build an inclusive and fair society for all.**

- 3.3 Government recognises the important role that national infrastructure organisations play in shaping the development of its policies and their abilities to provide specialist advice.² According to NCVO's Value for Infrastructure Programme (VIP) "infrastructure refers to the organisations and networks that exist to help voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to achieve their mission." Common functions for infrastructure organisations include **influence, develop and connect**. Infrastructure organisations, including national infrastructure organisations, may only work in one or two of these three areas and their work may also cross over areas.³
- 3.4 In responding to the adjacent EIA Question J on 'how could a new strategic partners programme support equalities groups?' **our response focuses on the provision of support to BME VCOs.**
- 3.5 Voice4Change England will also be responding to the full consultation in the new year. To this end, we have planned ways to engage and consult with the breadth of the BME VCS including infrastructure and support organisations, frontline and grass-root groups as well as BME social enterprises.

4 About V4CE's response to the question 9

- 4.1 Our submission is set out in two sections. Firstly we propose an approach predicated on a ***joint working and ownership model*** between Government and VCS to help implement the Government strategy. In particular we propose recommendations for the OCS in developing an effective strategic partners' programme. Secondly, we discuss support for equalities groups in setting up the OCS strategic partners' programme with a focus on the BME VCS.
- 4.2 We also provide a '**business case**' for the provision of specialist, targeted and bespoke infrastructure support to the BME VCS and this is set out in **Annex A**. It describes the need for specialist national infrastructure organisations in helping BME VCOs to continue to contribute in delivering public services, enabling people to have a voice in shaping the communities and areas around them, mobilising local networks and encouraging civic participation and responsibility.

² Cabinet Office –Office for Civil Society (October 2010) 'Supporting a Stronger Civil Society: An Office for Civil Society consultation on improving support for frontline civil society organisations'.

³ See NCVO Value of Infrastructure Programme <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/networking-discussions/groups/30238> and download the infrastructure functions map <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/explaining-infrastructure>

4.3 Our response draws on both qualitative and quantitative evidence from previous consultation exercises we have carried out including our responses to the following Government consultations:

- ◆ **CLG's Third Sector Strategy (Sep 2007);**
- ◆ **Social Investment Wholesale Bank (Sep 2009);**
- ◆ **Capacitybuilders' Single Equalities Scheme (Oct 2009);**
- ◆ **Spending Review (Sep 2010);**
- ◆ **Cutting Red Tape (Sep 2010) and the**
- ◆ **Renewal of the Compact (Oct 2010).⁴**

4.4 We have also used findings from our ***A shared vision for the future of the BME VCS*** (Sep 2010) research publication.⁵ This included over 100 online survey respondents representing a cross section of the BME VCS as well as thirteen in depth interviews with leaders in the BME VCS.

4.5 In addition, we engaged frontline BME VCOs at local levels in London, Liverpool and Bedford (Oct-Nov 2010). Evidence collected through our focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews informs this response.

5 Summary of key recommendations

5.1 Voice4Change England recommends a strategic partnership model of '**joint ownership**' which takes the Government-VCS relationship to a next level of genuine partnership from the existing relationship of Government as a funder and the VCS as recipient of funding delivering programmes on set outcomes. Our response outlines ways to build this strategic partnership model between the OCS and national infrastructure organisations.

5.2 The proposed strategic partnership model should be based on following **foundation principles**:

- a) involvement of a diverse group of stakeholders with specialist capabilities;**
- b) deep and shared understanding of the strategy by all delivery partners;**
- c) allowing flexibility to enable partners respond to the changing external environment; and**
- d) incorporating accountability and transparency of the functions to all delivery partners as well as to the public and organisations who are the end beneficiaries.**

5.3 The **membership** to the OCS strategic partners programme should be drawn in a manner that they:

⁴ Voice4Change England's consultation responses to various Government policy proposals are available at <http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/consultation-responses1.html>. The listed responses in particular have been referenced/quoted throughout this response due to their relevance to the arguments.

⁵ Voice4Change England 'A shared vision for the future of the BME VCS' (September 2010) available at <http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/shared-vision.html>.

- ◆ represent the interest and involvement of a diverse group of civil society organisations;
- ◆ have a track record of strategically *reaching* and *engaging* their respective sectors at local, sub-regional and national levels;
- ◆ are working in creative partnerships, co-production, co-operation and in collaboration with other infrastructure organisations at all necessary spatial levels in and outside their respective sectors; and
- ◆ have open and transparent governance structures with clear accountability to their membership that provides legitimacy and a mandate.

- 5.4 The OCS should also **promote good practice in equality and diversity** and ensure that the application processes and assessment criteria clearly enable BME and other equality groups to apply and not set barriers on their eligibility and engagement.
- 5.5 In **performing a strategic role**, the strategic partners would regularly meet with the OCS Minister and senior officials. These meetings to be jointly chaired to establish a culture of mutuality and working together towards a shared goal.
- 5.6 The strategic partners and the OCS would set up and support **thematic panels on key Government priorities**.
- 5.7 The strategic partners in their delivery role would agree with OCS **ways to deliver** some or all of the above priorities for their respective sectors. They would help to **implement the Compact** to the widest scope of the Government-VCS partnerships and raise its profile and awareness.
- 5.8 The OCS could set up and resource an **independent scrutiny committee** consisting of VCS representatives to ensure that the accountability and legitimacy of the strategic partners is routinely monitored and that they continue to be the voice of the VCS during the length of their relationship with the OCS.
- 5.9 **BME VCS national representation** in the strategic partners programme is imperative to help support BME voluntary and community organisations to seize the opportunities that the Big Society agenda and 'Building a Stronger Civil Society' presents. Any prospective strategic partner representing the BME VCS must also be able to comply with all necessary conditions of the membership criteria proposed in Section 1 of this response.
- 5.10 The **core/strategic funding** available under the OCS strategic partners programme should be **appropriate to the delivery on agreed outcomes** and enable strategic partners to facilitate planning for the long term. It should recognise the costs of administration and evaluation that are associated with projects and contracts proposed by the prospective organisation and should not only be assessed by its annual income. Care should be had in allocating resources and funding for the diversity of the sector (the scope) and not only by looking at the organisations' income. A ceiling or 'cap' on the maximum

level of funding to a strategic partner may unwittingly act against smaller organisations and place an unnecessary barrier to engagement and participation.[See Section 2 - paragraphs 10.8 – 10.11].

6 Section 1: Helping the Government implement 'Building a Stronger Civil Society' – relationship of national infrastructure organisations with the Government and role of the strategic partners to the OCS

6.1 To help Government implement 'Building a Stronger Civil Society' in a robust, targeted and efficient manner, national infrastructure organisations are imperative in the fabric of the civil society.⁶ **A 'business case' for the provision of specialist, targeted and bespoke national infrastructure support to the BME VCS is provided in Annex A of this response.**

6.2 In this section, our response focuses on *how* to build an effective relationship between Government and national infrastructure organisations which help deliver the Government strategy. In particular we propose recommendations for the OCS in developing an effective strategic partners' programme that is inclusive and supportive of equalities groups including the BME VCS.

7 Building a culture of 'joint ownership' in delivering Government strategy

7.1 **It is important to acknowledge the following as the foundation principles for an effective, defined, and timely implementation of the strategy:**

- a) **Delivering through the involvement of a diverse group of stakeholders with specialist capabilities;**
- b) **Deep and shared understanding of the strategy by all delivery partners;**
- c) **Allowing flexibility to enable partners respond to the changing external environment; and**
- d) **Incorporating accountability and transparency of the functions to all delivery partners as well as to the public and organisations who are the end beneficiaries.**

7.2 In response to question 9 of the consultation, **we recommend that the prospective OCS strategic partners programme build on above principles in constructing a partnership with national infrastructure organisations.**

7.3 We recommend a strategic partnership model of **'joint ownership'**⁷ which takes the Government-VCS relationship to a next level of genuine partnership

⁶ See documents and discussion available at NCVO's Value of Infrastructure Programme website <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/networking-discussions/groups/30238>

⁷ The proposed model of 'joint ownership' in this response is inspired by the practice in Canada on government-VCS relationship. Our suggestions to establish 'joint ownership' model for the OCS strategic partners programme have been informed by the content of a journal paper published in 2001. See Susan D. Phillips 'From Charity to Clarity: Reinventing Federal Government-Voluntary Sector Relationships', The Philanthropist, Volume 16, No.4 accessed from <http://www.thephilanthropist.ca/index.php/phil/article/view/92>

from the existing relationship of Government as a funder and the VCS as recipient of funding delivering programmes on set outcomes.

Defining the 'joint ownership' model

- 7.4 *The 'joint ownership' model for the OCS strategic partners' programme would mean joint ownership of delivering the Government strategy. Whilst allowing space for difference of opinion and deliberation leading to mutual consensus between the two partners, this joint ownership would require equal representation and decision making from Government and the VCS.* In the next section we suggest a number of ways to apply the 'joint ownership' model in establishing the OCS strategic partners' programme.

8 Suggestions for selecting strategic partners

- 8.1 The membership of the strategic partners to the OCS should be drawn in a manner that **they represent the interest and involvement of a diverse group of civil society organisations.**⁸ This group would consist of national infrastructure organisations with specialist capabilities, evidenced by their existing delivery, to inform, develop and advise on the implementation of the Government strategy. **A recent feature article by Civil Society identified 'infrastructure for minority groups' as being the most at risk in securing membership as strategic partners to the Government.**⁹ This exclusion of specialist infrastructure representation must be avoided in selecting strategic partners to the OCS.
- 8.2 The members must **have a track record of strategically reaching and engaging their respective sectors at local, sub-regional and national levels.** This strategic engagement span from providing platforms to their sectors to directly engaging and influencing key Government policies; enabling their sectors to have a voice by informing and encouraging them to engage in policy decisions; raising critical issues in the media that effect the existing state and scope of their sectors; researching on the sector; encouraging volunteering; and advocating and campaigning on behalf of their sectors.
- 8.3 The members must also be able to show that they are **working in creative partnerships, co-production, co-operation and in collaboration with other infrastructure organisations at all necessary spatial levels in and outside their respective sectors.** These relationships should also be able to demonstrate that equality and diversity is being addressed and not tokenistic.

⁸ This requirement is in line with Government's principles of reform laid out in 'Supporting a Stronger Civil Society: An Office for Civil Society consultation on improving support for frontline civil society organisations', Cabinet Office – Office for Civil Society (October 2010) p7 which reads "to address inequality, ensure all voices are heard and promote cohesion, there is a need to ensure support is accessible by diverse organisations."

⁹ See http://www.civilsociety.co.uk/finance/indepth/content/6081/spending_cuts_and_strategic_partners

- 8.4 The members would also be able to evidence that they **have open and transparent governance structures with clear accountability to their membership that provides legitimacy and a mandate.**
- 8.5 The strategic partners **collectively would have good links with the private sector and the ability to promote philanthropy, corporate social responsibility and private sector volunteering.**
- 8.6 The members would be **able to demonstrate the long term impact their membership will have on the sustainability of their respective sectors.** They should be able to show that as a result of their membership, their respective sectors would be more resilient and making a good use of opportunities available to them in delivering public services, campaigning for good causes, and encouraging civic participation. They should also be able to demonstrate their commitment to climate change movement by taking actions in reducing their carbon emissions.
- 8.7 And last but not least, **the OCS in selecting its strategic partners must promote good practice in equality and diversity and ensure that the application processes and assessment criteria clearly enable BME and other equality groups to apply and not set barriers on their eligibility and engagement. This would help Government respect its commitment to targeting resources where there is most need and to address disadvantage and achieve the maximum impact.**¹⁰

9 Suggestions for the role of the strategic partners

- 9.1 The strategic partners will work with the OCS on the 'joint ownership' model proposed above. This will demand establishing a way of working which supports joint ownership of the Government agenda based on the **foundation principles as set out in paragraph 7.1 above.**
- 9.2 The first essential element of the joint ownership model is effective meetings between the OCS and strategic partners. **We recommend that in line with the foundation principles 7.1 a, b and d, the strategic partners should regularly meet with the OCS Minister and senior officials. These meetings should be jointly chaired to establish a culture of mutuality and working together towards a shared goal.** In the section below we propose a number of roles and responsibilities for the strategic partners in supporting the OCS.

Joint partner in developing and implementing the strategy

- 9.3 The strategic partners and the OCS would **identify priorities** in delivering (implementing) the Government strategy. They would jointly set short term and long term goals and agree ways to take forward the implementation of the strategy.

¹⁰ Cabinet Office – Office for Civil Society (October 2010) 'Supporting a Stronger Civil Society: An Office for Civil Society consultation on improving support for frontline civil society organisations' p7.

- 9.4 The strategic partners and the OCS would **set up and support thematic panels** on key Government priorities¹¹ to inform the development and implementation of the strategy. In line with the foundation principles proposed in **section 7.1 a**, these panels could decide to invite wider sector representatives specialist on the specific panels drawn from respective memberships. This would allow OCS to develop its relationship with wider national infrastructure organisations and others in addition to the strategic partners. The panels should also be chaired jointly by the nominated strategic partners and the OCS senior officials.
- 9.5 Our suggestions for **thematic panels** are as following:
- a) **Empowering Communities Panel**: this panel could advise on the implementation of the strategy on 'new powers and opportunities', 'freeing up local funding' and 'transparency and data'. The panel would discuss the implementation of strategic objectives set out in the strategy including 'reforms to planning system', 'local grants for local priorities', and 'transparency and accountability of the government funding'.
 - b) **Public Services Reform Panel**: this panel could advise on the implementation of the strategy on 'modernising commissioning & procurement', 'promoting employee owned co-operatives', and 'supporting for social enterprises, mutuals and co-operations'.
 - c) **Promoting Social Action Panel**: this panel could advise on the implementation of the strategy on 'volunteering and philanthropy', 'Big Society Bank', 'reducing the regulatory burdens for VCOs', 'National Citizen Services, and 'community action' including programmes on community organisers and Community First fund.
- 9.6 In addition to the above we propose **targeted panels** for the '**transition fund**'; '**modernisation and capacity building the VCS**' and finally a panel on '**cross departmental involvement** of the VCS in the development of departmental policies and programmes.' The proposed functions for these panels are laid out below.
- 9.7 The **transition fund panel** could review the progress on the distribution of the funds and emerging outcomes. It could meet with the Big Lottery to provide a strategic steer on the assessment of the fund outcomes and raise its profile in support of the Government in the VCS and wider stakeholders.
- 9.8 The **modernisation and capacity building the VCS panel** could set out programmes and advise on their implementation to ensure that the VCS at all spatial level is fit-for-purpose to continue to contribute in delivering public services, enabling people to have a voice in shaping the communities and

¹¹ See 'Section 1: Big society reform agenda – the opportunity for charities, voluntary and community groups and social enterprises'. in HM Government (October 2010) 'Building a Stronger Civil Society: A strategy for voluntary and community groups, charities and social enterprises'.

areas around them, mobilising local networks and encouraging civic participation and responsibility.

- 9.9 The **cross departmental involvement panel** could ensure effective cross departmental joined up working in supporting the civil society. It is important to get a buy-in of key Government departments in any proposed policy in regards to the sector. Many departments have individual policies and frameworks on working with the civil society however there is a massive need for these policies to complement each other to avoid a fragmented central Government relationship with the sector.¹²

Joint Partner in delivering and promoting the strategy

- 9.10 **The strategic partners in their delivery role would agree with OCS ways to deliver some or all of the above priorities for their respective sectors.** This delivery would be agreed on using the 'outcomes' approach to contribute to the long term positive change to the end beneficiaries i.e their respective voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors.
- 9.11 The strategic partners would **promote joined up Government and VCS policies** in their respective sectors. They would work towards raising the profile of the OCS and be responsible to inform their sectors about the OCS activities.
- 9.12 The OCS currently plays a lead strategic role to ensure that the **renewed Compact** is recognised, respected and implemented with robust accountability measures for the Government to comply with its commitments. The strategic partners and the OCS would continue to implement and adhere to the principles of the national Compact in forming the foundations of the 'joint ownership' model. They should help to implement the Compact to the widest scope of the Government-VCS partnerships and raise its profile and awareness. We recommend that this role can be delivered through the cross departmental involvement panel proposed above.

Accountability of the strategic partners

- 9.13 We also recommend **the OCS to set up and resource an independent scrutiny committee consisting of VCS representatives to ensure that the accountability and legitimacy of the strategic partners is routinely monitored and that they continue to be the voice of the VCS during the length of their relationship with the OCS.** The committee, to be chaired independently from

¹² In our response to the Renewed Compact consultation (October 2010), Voice4Change England recommended that the "Government should commit to robust accountability measures including: supporting an ombudsman role for implementing the Compact; ensuring consistent implementation across Government departments; aligning the Compact with equalities legislation; reporting requirements and ensuring transparency in data." Available at <http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/assets/files/V4CE%20Response%20to%20Compact%20Renewed%20Oct%202010.pdf>

the strategic partners and the OCS, would commission research, consult broadly and make recommendations on improving accountability in the sector.

10 Section 2: EIA Question J “how could a new strategic partners programme support equalities groups?” Focus on the BME VCS

State of the BME VCS funding and challenges ahead

- 10.1 **BME VCOs have often struggled to generate sufficient income to carry out their activities with 81% of our ‘A shared vision for the future of the BME VCS’ research survey respondents identifying this as an issue¹³.** Few BME VCOs are able to secure longer term funding and the low level of funding makes it harder to build up reserves. Of the 17,000 organisations that make up the BME VCS, 53% receive their funding from statutory sources (central government (49%); local government (26%); health authority (16%); and EU (9%))¹⁴. **This dependence on Government funding for many organisations means that the impact of public sector cuts is likely to be significant.** (See *Voice4Change England’s response to the Treasury on CSR consultation for a fuller discussion on the impact of the funding cuts on the BME VCS.*)¹⁵
- 10.2 There is emerging evidence that cuts have already been widespread as a result of the recession and that this impacts significantly on specialist services.¹⁶ Without a specialist, targeted and be-spoke infrastructure support the impact of public spending cuts is likely to further reduce the capacity of the BME VCS. Respondents to our *A shared vision* research reported that organisations are already closing. And where this is happening, the adverse impact on BME communities is becoming visible. For instance our focus group respondent in Liverpool (November 2010) feared that:

“specialist services are going to be lost. SEVA (BME VCO) is a specialist service that meet cultural needs and it’s a priority, and if we take away that grass-root work, how are we ever going to meet the needs of the people that we work with. They already miss out because people think they are ‘hard to reach’. In Cheshire we have to signpost all the way to SEVA (in Manchester) because we do not have specific services for BME women with mental health issues. If SEVA are getting cut backs then this will have a massive impact.”

¹³ Voice4Change England ‘A shared vision for the future of the BME VCS’ (September 2010) available at <http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/shared-vision.html>

¹⁴ V4CE, 2007, [Bridge the Gap: What is known about the BME Third Sector in England.](#)

¹⁵ [http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/assets/files/consultations/V4CE%20spending%20review%202010%20submission%20final%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/assets/files/consultations/V4CE%20spending%20review%202010%20submission%20final%20(2).pdf)

¹⁶ Ibid.

Lack of access to finance

- 10.3 In our response to the Social Investment Wholesale Bank (the Big Society Bank) consultation (October 2009) we stated that access to finance is extremely necessary for the future development of BME VCOs. Our response provided evidence on the specific barriers facing BME social enterprises and businesses including the evidence by the Bank of England which concludes that even after risk and information issues are taken into account there may be an element of ethnic discrimination amongst finance providers either through direct discrimination or statistical discrimination. We recommended that the Bank “should work with BME infrastructure organisations to champion social investment and provide advisory services targeted at BME VCOs.”¹⁷

Strategic BME VCS representation

- 10.4 We have provided a business case for the provision of specialist, targeted and be-spoke infrastructure support to the BME VCS in annex A of this response. **In this section we would like to reiterate the recommendations made in the preceding section that the membership of the strategic partners should be drawn in a manner that it represents the interest and involvement of a diverse group of civil society organisations.** This group would have specialist capabilities, evidenced by their existing delivery, to inform, develop and advise on the implementation of the Government strategy.
- 10.5 **BME VCS national representation in the strategic partners programme is imperative to help support BME voluntary and community organisations to seize the opportunities that the Big Society agenda and ‘Building a Stronger Civil Society’ presents. Any prospective strategic partner representing the BME VCS must also be able to comply with all necessary conditions of the membership criteria proposed in Section 1 of this response from points 8.1 to 8.7.**

“we need national BME infrastructure organisations to influence and challenge the local infrastructure to involve us in local decision making and to support us in meeting the needs of BME communities. We need them to direct and signpost us to the right support and put mechanisms in place to investigate lack of representation and support for our sector at local level.”

Respondent at V4CE focus group discussion, Bedford, November 2010

- 10.6 Respondents to *A shared vision* research expressed a fear that the Big Society agenda may give the most resources to those with the loudest voices and that BME communities, particularly in areas where they are a minority community such as rural and suburban areas, would be

¹⁷ <http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/assets/files/consultations/Social%20investment%20wholesale%20bank%20response%20final.pdf>

marginalised. In devolving powers to public decision making or giving members of the public the opportunity to run public services there were concerns over how the voice of marginalised communities would be heard and where the strategic direction would come from.

"If we are now talking about working much more locally and less centrally controlled system, then it's important to ensure that local communities know that the support and resources are available to them to achieve this. We have to fund projects and organisations to provide that support and voice or that Big Society at a local level actually will not have the voices of the most marginalised." *A shared vision interviewee, September 2010*

- 10.7 In responding to the Capacitybuilders' consultation on their Single Equality Scheme (September 2009), we argued that 'as well as providing targeted funding it is also essential that Capacitybuilders ensure mainstream funding programmes are both delivered by and reach BME VCOs.'¹⁸ In other words, all mainstream funding programmes should deliver benefits to all parts of the VCS including equality groups.

Allocating resources to the BME VCS

- 10.8 Voice4Change England welcomed the update from the Government on the Spending Review outcome (Open letter to the Civil Society by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Minister for Civil Society, dated 10th November 2010). Whilst we are pleased that the OCS has secured a strong settlement in the recent Spending Review of around £470 million in total, we remain concerned with the key features of the new OCS strategic partners programme as indicated in the letter by Nick Hurd MP, Minister for Civil Society to the existing strategic partners dated 29th July 2010.
- 10.9 **Significantly reducing the number of strategic partners may help establishing a more 'strategic' relationship with the VCS representatives, but it may also restrict the ability of the programme to be informed by a diverse group of civil society organisations.**
- 10.10 The proposed criteria states that selected partners will only be offered 25% of their total funding/turnover. This would disproportionately impact the ability of certain organisations to deliver a broader span of activity to their respective sectors. It will not sufficiently support [their] core functions to deliver stable, long term support to their members and stakeholders. **We recommend that the core funding should be appropriate to the delivery on agreed outcomes and enable strategic partners to facilitate planning for the long term. It should recognise the costs of administration and evaluation that are associated with projects and contracts proposed by the prospective organisation and should not be assessed by its annual income alone. Where**

¹⁸ <http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/assets/files/consultations/CB%20Single%20Equality%20Scheme%20response%20final.pdf>

discretion is used to award more than the stated 25%, it should make sound business sense to do so. Care should be had in allocating resources and funding for the diversity of the sector (the scope) and not only by looking at the organisations' size. For instance, if only one BME national infrastructure organisation becomes a strategic partner and received the proposed 25% of its total income, the BME VCS as a sector would be receiving disproportionately less funding which, we would argue, is unfair.

- 10.11 We recognise the importance of setting a cap on the maximum grant funding for strategic partners but suggest that some discretion is permissible to accommodate the particular fragilities and circumstances of relatively smaller organizations particularly as experienced in the broader equalities and BME VCS. This would ensure that participating organisations perform a relatively equal role in advising on the development and implementation of the Government strategy. It can also help the OCS to allocate the necessary resources on 'strategic activities' that we highlighted in Section 1 above.

11 Conclusion:

- 11.1 In setting out our response to Question 9, we have proposed ways to help the Government implement its strategy 'Building a Stronger Civil Society' and delivering its vision of the Big Society. Our key recommendation for the OCS strategic partners programme is to be structured on a model of *joint working and ownership* between the Government and the VCS. Our response also addresses the EIA Question J on support for the equalities groups with a focus on the BME VCS. Lastly, we have provided in Annex A, a business case in support of the national BME infrastructure organisations.

12 Comments on the response

We would be happy to discuss our response further with the Office for Civil Society.

Please contact Arjumand Kazmi, Head of Policy, Voice4Change England at arjumand@voice4change-england.co.uk or on 0207 843 6129 to discuss the response in detail.

For more information about Voice4Change England's activities, please visit www.voice4change-england.co.uk.

Our postal address is Voice4Change-England, Lancaster House, 31-33 Islington High Street, London, N1 9LH.

A 'business case' for the provision of specialist, targeted and be-spoke infrastructure support to the BME VCS

- 1.1 We welcome the Government's recognition of the value of civil society organisations "to mobilise and support people, particularly those who sometimes struggle to find a voice" and its vision for the sector "as a resilient and independent partner, to play an even more influential role in shaping a stronger sense of society and improving people's lives."¹⁹ We also welcome the recognition of the value of infrastructure organisations "in shaping the development of Government policy" and their ability to provide specialist advice supported by their economies of scale.²⁰
- 1.2 The value and role of civil society organisations and in particular the role that infrastructure organisations play at different spatial levels has also been recognised in various pieces of research and policy studies conducted by independent academic institutions and think tanks. In England, the Compact provides a partnership framework between the Government and civil society organisations underpinned by a number of agreed principles and set of commitments for both partners to the agreement. The Compact also recognises the value of infrastructure provision and supports infrastructure organisations.
- 1.3 In our recent publication *A shared vision for the future of the BME VCS*, we argue that **the BME infrastructure is required at all spatial levels as it is essential to provide a coordinated voice for the sector.**²¹ **This requires a reach and understanding of communities who have faced disadvantage and discrimination. BME infrastructure organisations provide customised, specialist support to reach and meet the needs of BME VCOs.**
- 1.4 We also argue that the capacity building is not a generic skill that can be rolled out to meet the needs of all organisations. **BME VCOs have specific challenges and capacity building needs.**²² *A shared vision for the future of the BME VCS* calls on policy makers to "recognise and strengthen the value of BME VCS infrastructure organisations in identifying and meeting the needs of frontline BME VCOs in organisational development and making the available support accessible, responsive and tailored."

¹⁹ HM Government (October 2010) 'Building a Stronger Civil Society: A strategy for voluntary and community groups, charities and social enterprises' p3.

²⁰ Cabinet Office – Office for Civil Society (October 2010) 'Supporting a Stronger Civil Society: An Office for Civil Society consultation on improving support for frontline civil society organisations', consultation question 9, p11.

²¹ Voice4Change England 'A shared vision for the future of the BME VCS' (September 2010) available at <http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/shared-vision.html>

²² Shared Intelligence (2008) 'Evaluation of the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning: Consultation with BME Third Sector Organisations.'

“In a society based on divisions, there needs to be specialist infrastructure. May it be supporting communities on housing, boy scouts, gender issues or BME issues.” (Shared vision interviewee)

- 1.5 **71% of the respondents to our online survey which informed *A shared vision* publication called for the Government to provide the BME VCS with better resources.** Detailed interviews with the sector leaders stated that an underdeveloped and fragmented approach persists when it comes to providing infrastructure support to BME VCOs. A recent research commissioned by the Big Lottery Fund Equal Support (May 2010) on the need for identity based organisational development support for identity based VCOs suggests that “particular effort is needed to establish trust and confidence with groups who face prejudice and discrimination.” The report also found examples “of identity-based organisations making particular efforts to address the needs of minority groups within their remit in a way that generic organisations setting up specialist services often did not.”²³ Areas where support is most needed range from developing business strategy and its promotion to premises needs of small groups; strong leadership and governance to skilling up staff and mentoring; mergers; partnerships and collaborations to the need for delivering be-spoke specialist support; raising funds and income diversification.
- 1.6 These needs may appear similar to the needs of other small organisations but **with BME VCOs an understanding of organisational culture and dynamics is critical.** In our response to the Capacitybuilders’ consultation on its single equalities scheme (October 2009) we discussed key issues for the BME VCS to include tackling racism, inequality and exclusion; single equalities agenda; demonstrating value; lack of engagement in decision making processes; funding and other support; and marginalisation in the commissioning and procurement agenda.²⁴ Our response listed a number of areas for support and capacity building identified by respondent BME VCOs including:
- ◆ Access to information including robust data and research
 - ◆ Partnership working
 - ◆ Networking
 - ◆ Training of leaders
 - ◆ Finance
 - ◆ Fundraising and sustainability
 - ◆ Governance
 - ◆ Performance management including monitoring and evaluation
 - ◆ HR and volunteer management
 - ◆ Training and investment in collaborative working, and
 - ◆ Management

²³ Big Lottery Fund & Equal to the Occasion (May 2010) ‘Equal support - Do identity based voluntary and community groups need identity-based organisational development?’ p37

²⁴ Voice4Change England (October 2010) consultation response to the Capacitybuilders’ Single Equalities Scheme available at <http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/assets/files/consultations/CB%20Single%20Equality%20Scheme%20response%20final.pdf>

1.7 In our response to Joint Cabinet Office-BIS Task Force on cutting red tape (Sep 2010), we provided a list of burdens that restrict the operation and running of small BME VCOs including:

- ◆ Increasingly complex funding application processes
- ◆ Criticism by funders and commissioners for building reserves or surplus to reinvest back in to their organisations
- ◆ Struggle to secure funding for overhead costs and payment in arrears rather than in advance
- ◆ Insufficient resources to invest in quality assurance systems
- ◆ Lack of communication and feedback from funders and commissioners
- ◆ Lack of technical support that is appropriate, accessible and nuanced by service providers in terms of the day to day realities of experiencing discrimination and disadvantage, and
- ◆ Lack of capacity and resource to research and evidence gaps in service provision to BME communities. ²⁵

1.8 There is an opportunity for better partnership working between support organisations to ensure BME VCOs can access the full range of support available and can achieve efficiency savings. **There is a risk that partnerships with generic support providers could lead to the visibility of the sector and 'BME perspective' being lost and thus if this is to happen it is important that Government resources and supports the development of effective partnerships.** This is part of the recommendations made within the Big Lottery Fund research study which proposed an approach where "identity-specific infrastructure would work with mainstream providers to improve access to and inclusive support for BME, LGBT and other frontline groups".²⁶

1.9 **Advocacy on behalf of BME VCS frontline organisations is also seen "as a huge void"** (*A shared vision* interviewee). It is important to recognise that historically, generic support providers have not effectively engaged BME VCOs when it comes to informing the design and implementation of the public policy. **National and regional BME VCS infrastructure organisations do not only fill this void by direct interventions to work with the Government and other opinion formers, they have also been working with generic infrastructure organisations to improve their engagement and capacity building support provision to BME frontline groups.**

1.10 The NAZ Project London (NPL) in October 2010 were facing substantive cuts to its funding, in a face-to-face interview to V4CE stated their value beyond the service they provide in influencing policies and how this will be 'harder' for them to retain.

²⁵ Voice4Change England (September 2010) 'Response to Joint Cabinet Office-BIS Task Force on cutting red tape', available upon request.

²⁶ Big Lottery Fund & Equal to the Occasion (May 2010) 'Equal support - Do identity based voluntary and community groups need identity-based organisational development?' p9.

“...the problem is that with more cut backs, it will be harder to go to consultations because we are not being paid to do that. As the funding shrinks, organisations are concentrating on dealing with what is the letter of the contract. And therefore the policy influence roles are less supported and difficult to be involved in.”

- 1.11 In response to the question on what support NAZ Project London would like from national BME infrastructure organisations, the interview respondent outlined ‘policy responses and influence’. They demanded BME national infrastructure organisations to be ‘the channel to (reach) frontline groups on a more regular basis.

“There has to be that constant feedback to Government.”

- 1.12 This lack of influence and engagement in policy formulation and influence is also documented in a recent research by MODA and Middlesex University (June 2010). The research found that often “consultation events have a low presence of BME groups. This is due to a number of barriers, including language and jargon, intimidating environment, cost of attending and recruiting interpreters.”²⁷
- 1.13 **We believe that national BME infrastructure organisations have a role to play in meaningfully engaging the BME VCS in the design and delivery of public policy.** This meaningful engagement must follow the principle of ‘informed engagement’²⁸ in policy discussions whereas the infrastructure organisations help to translate policy proposal for their respective sectors. This bridges the ‘understanding gap’ between marginalised groups and the Government.
- 1.14 **Lack of representation of the BME VCS at decision making tables particularly at local level add to the advocacy void.** Many BME VCOs feel their consultation responses do not impact the final outcomes. Under-representation is particularly acute for groups including BME communities in rural areas and suburbs and for Gypsies and Travellers.

“I would probably say that across the piece minority and BME communities have no real representation and it’s the nature of being in a minority that drives that exclusion. It’s majority communities that dominate the agenda and minority communities, because they are minority communities never have sufficient civic voting power to achieve the influence they need.”
(*Shared vision* interviewee)

²⁷ Moda and Middlesex University (June 2010) ‘Migrant and minority community organisations: funding, sustainability and ways forward’ interim report, p15.

²⁸ Voice4Change England engages and consults with BME VCOs based on its framework of ‘informed engagement’. The framework seeks to inform the BME VCS by first *translating* Government policies to enable better understanding of the policy proposals and then consultation on these. Framework can be made available upon request.

- 1.13 The value of the BME VCS national infrastructure organisations has also been recognised by the generic VCS. In pledging their support to *A shared vision for the future of the BME VCS*, generic infrastructure organisations recognise the important role of the BME VCS.

Sir Stuart Etherington from NCVO pledge of support: *"NCVO is pleased to pledge its support to taking a Shared Vision forward. BME VCOs are a critical part of civil society and it is important that we work together in support of communities to create a fairer and more equal society."*

Justin Davis Smith from Volunteering England pledge of support: *"A strong, vibrant and sustainable BME voluntary and community sector is essential for the health of society and for building the Big Society. Volunteering England is pleased to support A Shared Vision and looks forward to working with Voice4Change England to help make it a reality".*

See <http://www.voice4change-england.co.uk/shared-vision.html>

- 1.14 In arguing a role for the BME VCS, *A shared vision* lists the following:

- ◆ To promote equality and human rights.
- ◆ To tackle exclusion, discrimination, injustice and poverty.
- ◆ To contribute to social economic and cultural development.
- ◆ To celebrate and value minority cultures.
- ◆ To champion the voice of BME communities.
- ◆ To support a right to self determination.
- ◆ To connect, engage and be accountable to communities.
- ◆ To create opportunities for voluntary action.
- ◆ To ensure civic participation and representation.
- ◆ To galvanise entrepreneurial spirit.
- ◆ To respond to the changing needs of BME communities.
- ◆ To meet the needs of groups that others label 'hard to reach'.
- ◆ To build confidence and capacity in communities through information, advice and guidance services.
- ◆ To influence Public Authorities to ensure they embed equality in their work.

*"We want to see a **strong, resilient, sustainable and responsive BME VCS at all spatial levels**, including BME social enterprises. It will have an increasingly critical edge in **challenging inequality** and **strengthening civil society**. By developing a strong narrative on the importance of **promoting race equality, solidarities** will be created across all communities. Our voice will be valued by policy makers and will influence public policy at all spatial levels to better meet the needs of BME and other marginalised communities."*

Voice4Change England 'A shared vision for the future of the BME VCS' (Sep 2010)