Alliance Building Guide

Rethink Mental Illness.

Getting started

Get buy-in from local systems, including funding to set up the alliance	Funding is necessary to set up an alliance. This can be from the ICS or Trust, or another source. We believe that at least 25% of systems funding should be allocated to the VCSE sector.
Organise core internal staffing	Who is responsible for communications, community engagement, admin, etc within the alliance? Do they belong to one organisation or several? Consider the cost, skills needed and time commitment.
Decide on membership of the alliance	Is this a VCSE-only alliance, or will it include statutory bodies?

Engaging with communities

Needs assessment	Look at the demographics, deprivation, health inequalities, and geography of the area and identifying key needs.
Asset mapping	Look at which organisations are currently operating in the locality, what they offer, and who they serve. You can use our asset mapping checklist as a starting point.
Gaps assessment	Identify which groups of people are currently not able to access services or are having a poor experience of services. Look at funding gaps experienced by organisations.
Approaching organisations to be members of the alliance	It is important to have something to offer, for example funding/microgrants, free training, or free use of space so the relationship is mutually beneficial.

Vision and strategy

Agree on common core purpose for the alliance	Coproduce a purpose, vision and values across all alliance members and experts by experience based on common interest. Ensure this is regularly referred back to and refreshed if needed.
Establish required outcomes and focus areas for the alliance	For example, adults and older adults, children and young people, neurodiversity, personality disorders, or other required focus areas.
Agree on terms of reference for alliance meetings	Embed the principles above and include details for how the alliance is defined, developed and verified.
Develop necessary policies	For example, around safeguarding, accountability, data sharing, membership agreement etc.
Coproduce mental health strategy	Ideally in partnership with statutory partners.

Governance

Decide on governance structure: how to manage risks and funds	Some alliances have larger VCSE organisations apply to be a 'Lead Accountable Body' who can manage risk and hold funds on behalf of the alliance and its members.
Set up decision-making structure, with clarity about who makes decisions about the alliance	Some alliances have a Partnership Board with elected representatives who can make decisions on behalf of the alliance. Others employ a 'one member, one vote' system across the alliance.
Ensure decision-making structure is representative of the full range of VCSE organisations involved	It should include grassroots and national organisations, people involved in direct delivery and in management positions, and organisations that provide support with wider determinants as well as direct mental health support.
Agree regular meetings to make decisions and share updates.	Consider timings, format, and frequency. Depending on the structure, it may be necessary to have separate whole-alliance and partnership board meetings.
Consider and appoint key roles such as the Chief Officer and/or Independent Chair	These roles can have different responsibilities depending on the alliance's needs, and can be combined into one role. Consider the time commitment needed and whether the role is voluntary or paid.
Recruit experts by experience to governance roles	This might be the Independent Chair, or other governance roles. Some alliances recruit a committee of experts by experience instead of one individual to better reflect the diversity of perspectives in the area.
Appoint alliance members to represent the alliance externally e.g. on ICB boards	Ideally the alliance will have multiple seats for representatives within the ICB structures. Representatives might be permanent or rotate.
Identify and develop key relationships within the ICB	Relationships with statutory partners is key for progression of the alliance's priorities – develop relationships with key decision makers within the ICB to act as advocates.

Comms and branding

Coproduce comms plan and strategy	Agree processes, responsibilities and timelines from the beginning.
Establish a name for the alliance	Collectively decide on a name that accurately represent the alliance and its members, purpose and vision.
Make a logo for the alliance	Invite members to get creative and design a recognisable logo for the alliance and vote for a winning design.
Create an online presence for the alliance	Ensure it is possible for people to contact the alliance, for example website, social media pages (have member organisations link to these on their own websites and social media).
Establish transparency around alliance activity for members and the general public	For example, set up a regular newsletter to share updates and opportunities from the alliance as well as a way to connect members to one another by inviting news.

Growth, reflection and sustainability

Contract delivery	This may come at a later stage, once the alliance has been established and is able to deliver larger-scale contracts. The alliance will likely have to approach the ICS proactively and will have to decide which partners are involved.
Hold reflection sessions with alliance members and partners	Revisit initial vision and purpose. Is this still suitable and accurate? What have the learnings been so far? Does this need to change or develop?
Continuous engagement with the community	Keep identifying gaps in representation. Respond to developments and challenges in the area.