**VCSEP COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT**

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**Purpose of this document**

This document aims to help you confidently explain the work and aims of the VCSEP.

The copy in this document should be used as the basis for engaging with your networks about the VCSEP.

If there’s any information you feel is missing from this document then please contact the VCSEP Communications Manager, Freya Carr, [fcarr@redcross.org.uk](mailto:fcarr@redcross.org.uk)

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## Introduction to the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership

The [Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership](https://www.vcsep.support/request-support) (Emergencies Partnership) is a government backed partnership between national and local voluntary and community sector organisations.

The Emergencies Partnership was formed based on learnings from the domestic crises of 2017, including Grenfell, and a sector-wide ambition to deliver a more coordinated response during emergencies.

Right now we are responding to the evolving Covid-19 crisis, but our long-term ambition is to establish a legacy which enables the voluntary and community sector, government and statutory agencies to work better together to ensure our country’s most vulnerable communities get the right support at the right time in an emergency.

We will do this through the following four key areas:

1. **A national platform** to gather intelligence on where people might be going without the support they need. These insights will be shared with the voluntary and community sector to help focus our response on those who are most vulnerable and with the highest level of unmet need.
2. **Our request for support service** will enable local organisations to seek additional support from the Emergencies Partnership for any needs which they do not have capacity to meet through existing local networks
3. **Five regional multi-agency cells** across England to help connect members of the voluntary and community sector and enable them to pool resource in response to local requests for support and emerging unmet need
4. **One national volunteering cell** to maintain an overview of capacity across the voluntary and community sector and provide a single point of contact for the government and statutory agencies to engage volunteers for large-scale nationwide volunteering requests

## More about our key workstreams

**National unmet need platform**

The unmet need platform will gather and share local, regional and national insights about where people and communities are going without the support they need. This will allow organisations to take more coordinated and strategic action in times of emergency, and ultimately enable a more human centred response that delivers the right support to the right people at the right time.

Nationally significant insights will be shared with government.

**Request for support service**

As restrictions are lifted and volunteers return to their day-jobs, we are already seeing the pressure on our sector begin to increase.

The request for support service is an innovative service which allows organisations to request additional support from the Emergencies Partnership, if they do not have capacity to meet needs through their existing local networks.

The service is not intended to replace what is already working well at a local level, but as a last resort option when demand outstrips supply, for example by providing practical support such as DBS checked volunteers.

How it works:

If you’re a member or representative of a local organisation or community group, you can submit your request for support to us at [vcsep.support](https://www.vcsep.support/request-support). This will be reviewed by leaders of local charities and infrastructure organisations, referred to as “Liaison Leads”, in your area who will check that the request cannot be fulfilled locally.

Once it’s confirmed that the request needs additional support from the VCSEP, this will be shared, via our multi-agency cells, with representatives from voluntary organisations across England who can offer different kinds of support.

**The role of Liaison Leads**

Thirty-nine Local Infrastructure Organisations have been selected by their peers to act as Local Liaison Leads (LLLs) in the process. LLLs provide a link between the multi-agency cells and a cluster of Local Infrastructure Organisations within a geographic area. Through regular and pro-active engagement, LLLs will support the local infrastructure cluster to meet local unmet need; report unmet need upward when it can't be met within the cluster; share local intelligence between the multi-agency cell and local infrastructure cluster; and engage with longer term work to build a sustainable approach.

The Emergencies Partnership will help raise the profile and support for local infrastructure and the value it brings. In turn, Local Liaison Leads will support the VCSEP by:

* Liaising with Local Infrastructure Organisations in their cluster at least weekly to obtain and share intelligence
* LiaisING with VCSEP on a weekly basis, acting as single point of contact for their cluster to share real-time intelligence on unmet needs, local VCSE responses, and escalating issues that can’t be resolved locally
* Attending events, focus groups and briefings, and collaborate with other LLLs, NAVCA and other VCSEP Partners to support the design and development of a sustainable platform for future emergency response

**Multi-agency cells**

In response to Covid-19, the Emergencies Partnership established multi-agency cells to help assess unmet need at a regional level and to source additional capacity for organisations who submit requests for support via our request for support service.

There are five multi-agency cells across England, with membership from organisations within the Emergencies Partnership and the wider voluntary and community sector, including British Red Cross, FareShare, RE:ACT, St John Ambulance and Victim Support. The organisations represented in each cell varies based on the needs and expertise at a regional level.

As standard, each multi-agency cell includes:

Cell lead – responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the cell. Influences and convenes the voluntary and community sector and escalates large-scale needs to the VCSEP and government

Project manager - responsible for managing the implementation of new ways of working and continuous improvement of the multi-agency cell model

Information manager – gathers and interprets data about unmet needs to inform how the cell prioritises the support it offers

VCS brokers – representatives from across the voluntary and community sector who oversee capacity within their respective organisations and the sector as a whole, in order to inform what resource can be provided in response to requests for support.

Engagement manager – responsible for maintaining relationships and enabling effective communication and collaboration between the multi-agency cell members and the external VCS and statutory stakeholders

Wins so far:

Through our request for support service and multi-agency cell structure, we have already been able to start filling gaps in capacity at a local level. Recent examples include:

* Delivering almost 800kg of food to a foodbank in Leominster, after they saw a 487% increase in demand
* Carrying out Covid-19 tests at care homes across Lancashire
* Delivering iPads to patients at St George’s Hospital, London
* Helping direct patients at a medical centre in Nottingham, ensuring they maintained social distancing guidelines
* Helping to marshal pedestrians in Maldon as they reconfigured the high street to allow for social distancing

**National volunteer coordination cell**

The national volunteer coordination cell, led by VCSEP member Volunteering Matters, will maintain an overview of capacity across the voluntary and community sector. The cell will be the first point of contact for government departments and statutory agencies to request volunteers for large-scale nationwide deployments.

For example, the cell was the first point of contact for the Department for Transport in the set-up of its Journey Makers scheme, and is currently being used to coordinate the deployment of volunteers to bus transport hubs across the UK.

## Key messages about the Emergencies Partnership

**General**

* The Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership is a unique government funded partnership between local and national voluntary and community sector organisations in the UK.
* The Emergencies Partnership was formed based on learnings from the domestic crises of 2017, including Grenfell, and a sector-wide ambition to deliver a more coordinated response during emergencies.
* Across our membership we have access to tens of thousands of volunteers who work in communities across the country every day, supporting people during local and national emergencies and crises, such as Covid-19, flooding, evacuations and house fires. The breadth of our work allows us to help the most “hidden” communities with the highest levels of inequality.
* While emergencies will change, collaboration will always be key. We believe that by working together in peacetime we will be able to better collaborate during times of emergency.
* Right now we are responding to the evolving Covid-19 crisis, but our long-term ambition is to establish a legacy which enables the voluntary and community sector, government and statutory agencies to work better together to ensure our country’s most vulnerable communities get the right support at the right time in an emergency.

**Coronavirus**

* A national crisis like coronavirus is the kind of emergency for which the Emergencies Partnership was formed and our members have been directly involved in the planning and delivery of a UK-wide response since the very beginning of this crisis.
* Although the first coronavirus peak is now behind us, we know the nature of the crisis will change and needs will continue. As restrictions are lifted and volunteers return to their day-jobs, the pressure on the voluntary and community sector is likely to increase.
* In response to the increased demand Covid-19 is placing on our sector, the Emergencies Partnership has established a new service for organisations to request additional support to meet local needs
* The service exists to help local organisations to continue their work in the community when demand outstrips supply, for example by providing practical support such as DBS checked volunteers.
* Using our [Request for Support](https://www.vcsep.support/request-support) service, you can notify us if you are involved with, or know of, any organisation unable to meet demand at a local level.

## FAQs about the VCSEP

**What is the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership?**

The [Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership](https://www.vcsep.support/request-support) (Emergencies Partnership) is a government backed partnership between national and local voluntary and community sector organisations.

The Emergencies Partnership was formed based on learnings from the domestic crises of 2017, including Grenfell, and a sector-wide ambition to deliver a more coordinated response during emergencies.

The Emergencies Partnership is co-chaired by the British Red Cross and the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA). Members include Business in the Community, British Red Cross, National Emergencies Trust, NAVCA, NCVO, Salvation Army, St John Ambulance, UK Community Foundations and Victim Support as well as government representatives from the Cabinet Office, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

While the current focus of the Emergencies Partnership is on responding to the evolving Covid-19 crisis, the partnership’s long-term goal is to strengthen connections across the voluntary and community sector, government and statutory agencies so that together we can deliver a more coordinated and effective response to emergencies.

**When and why was the Emergencies Partnership set up?**

The Emergencies Partnership was first established in 2018 following the domestic crises of 2017, including Grenfell and the Manchester Arena bombing. The partnership was born from a recognition that local organisations are almost always the first to respond to emergencies and an ambition from national charities to better support and collaborate with local voluntary organisations.

Prior to Covid-19, the partnership was a place for voluntary and community sector leaders to build better connections. More recently, the partnership began to shift towards a more operational model which will enable us to provide actionable insight and resource for organisations responding to emergencies.

**Who are the members of the Emergencies Partnership?**

Current members of the Emergencies Partnership are:

[Business in the Community](https://www.bitc.org.uk/blog/national-emergencies-trust-fundraising-appeal-launched/)

[British Red Cross](https://www.redcross.org.uk)

[National Emergencies Trust](https://nationalemergenciestrust.org.uk/)

[NAVCA](https://navca.org.uk/)

[NCVO](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/)

[Salvation Army](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/)

[St John Ambulance](https://www.sja.org.uk/)

[UK Community Foundations](https://www.ukcommunityfoundations.org/)

[Victim Support](https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/)

Between them, our members have access to tens of thousands of volunteers who work in communities across the country each day.

We are currently reviewing how our membership can flex and change depending on the nature of an emergency.

**Can you share examples of how this new partnership is working in practice?**

Since the set-up of the five multi-agency cells in May, and the rollout of their ‘request for support’ service, the Emergencies Partnership has been able to start lending additional capacity to organisations who are unable to meet needs through their existing local networks.

So far, we have:

* Delivered almost 800kg of food to a foodbank in Leominster, after they saw a 487% increase in demand
* Carried out Covid-19 tests at care homes across Lancashire
* Delivered iPads to patients at St George’s Hospital, London
* Helped direct patients at a medical centre in Nottingham, ensuring they maintained social distancing guidelines
* Helped marshal pedestrians in Maldon as they reconfigure the high street to allow for social distancing

While the multi-agency cells haven’t been established for long, and although the first Covid-19 peak is now well behind us, the nature of the current crisis will change and needs will continue. Particularly as restrictions are lifted and volunteers return to their day-jobs, we believe the pressure on the voluntary and community sector will begin to increase.

Through its multi-agency cells, the Emergencies Partnership can offer additional capacity to local organisations who can’t fulfil a task through their existing local networks. So, don’t forget to reach out to us if you know of a local organisation struggling to meet growing demand.