



North East Voluntary and Community Sector Equalities Coalition Draft Action Plan 2007-10

This plan has arisen from a wide-ranging development phase carried out between January and June 2007 involving 131 community-based equality and diversity groups and practitioners, plus a number of individuals. Consultations have taken place within each of the seven diversity strands affected by legislation (age, disability, faith, gender, LGBT, race) as well as with other disadvantaged groups.

This process recognised the changes in the equalities world triggered by the Commission for Equality and Human Rights with its emphasis on a more collaborative approach, as well as on the recognition of the distinctiveness of and complexities within each diverse community.

The resulting programme is made up of actions designed to be carried out both within each strand, and on a Coalition wide basis. The value base of the programme is enshrined in the expression 'nothing about us without us.' While Coalition members value and actively promote partnership working across private, public and community sectors, they are aware that there is a way to go before such partnerships are equal. For this reason, all actions in this plan are VCS-led as a positive action measure to ensure a strong and accurate voice for excluded communities in the formation of policy and the development of good practice.

The Coalition is pleased to take the lead on the Equality & Diversity Boards' 'Capacity Building and Voice' task group and to participate actively in each of its areas for action.

Working in partnership

Equality & Diversity Board

The VCS Equalities Coalition welcomes the opportunity to work closely with other strategic bodies to contribute to the implementation of the Equality & Diversity Board's joint action plan. The Coalition's commitment is to provide a framework for leadership from within the VCS, to develop collaborative approaches to awareness-raising, mainstreaming, evidence gathering and tackling discrimination. The Coalition is particularly committed to its lead role in the area of capacity building and developing a strong voice for and with excluded communities.



Equality NE Networking for Change; Strategic Partnerships; NE Assembly; VCS Regional Skills Forum; VCS Regional Infrastructure Group; GONE – Community Strategy, Community Cohesion

CAPACITY BUILDING and VOICE	
<i>Aim: Improve the ability of different equality groups to be better equipped, better represented and more involved in regional planning and decision-making through increased community engagement and community capacity building so that their voices can be more effectively included and heard</i>	
Background <i>The low representation and involvement of different equality groups in different key organisations in the region means that their issues are not fully recognised, articulated and addressed in planning, policy development or service-delivery. The new public sector equality duties require public bodies to engage with equality groups. For this to be done in a meaningful way with people engaging as equal partners and able to display leadership, equality groups need to feel confident about issues and power relationships. Such engagement is beneficial for all sectors and therefore the action is directed at all sectors including the public and private sectors. The actions build on work already being undertaken in the region through the voluntary and community sector coalition.</i>	
Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase community capacity in equality groups to enable increased engagement, participation and representation and promote collaborative working across different interest groups • Work with agencies in public, private and voluntary sectors to increase engagement with diverse communities • Enable relevant issues to be included in planning, policy and practice 	
Indicators of Success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased community engagement and increased representation of issues affecting different groups within planning and practice. • More diverse voluntary infrastructure • Increased confidence among equality groups (and evidence of increased lobbying and joint working by equality groups on common issues). • Increased representation of people from different equality groups in mainstream decision-making (e.g. at management committee level, councillors) and use evidence gathered as part of public sector equality duties to measure this. • Shared good practice. 	
Policy Lead	VCS Equalities Coalition
Delivery Partners Include:	CEHR (and existing commissions); Public sector bodies including Local Authorities, Strategic Health Authority, Colleges & Universities, Police & Fire Authorities; Voluntary sector, VCS Equalities Coalition; Private Sector; E&D experts, Equality groups
Resource Needs	Funding of skills development and networking events. Enabling sectors to understand the need and value of engagement.
Funding Sources	CEHR, Lottery, ONE, Trusts, Public Sector Bodies,

CAPACITY BUILDING and VOICE: ACTIONS

1. To build on the work of the VCS Equalities Coalition , CADE and Equality North East to improve capacity of equality strands so that they are able to develop knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in range of activities in the region, especially in planning and decision-making.
2. To support all sectors to build their capacity to improve engagement with diverse communities and to work towards increasing engagement with them.
3. To develop activities to enable E&D communities to network effectively, develop collective voices and work together collaboratively and to engage in civic society – citizenship, representation, engagement in decision-making at the earliest stages and through the process at local and regional levels.

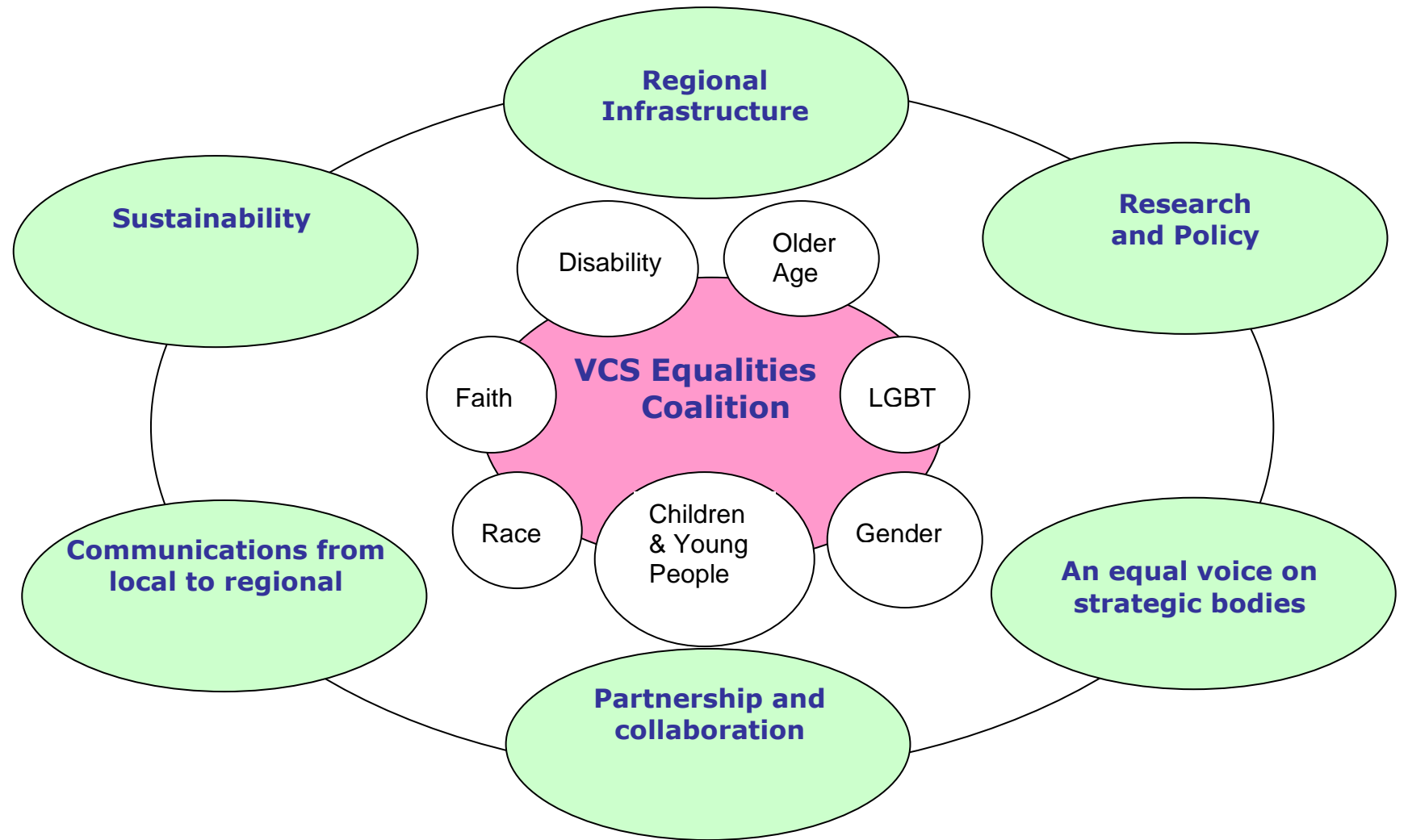
Strand specific programmes

1. To build on work of VCS Equalities Coalition and the CADE project to improve capacity of equality strands so that they are able to develop knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in range of activities in the region, especially in planning and decision-making.

1.1 Strand specific development

The VCS Coalition wants to support the following activities **in each strand** to provide a sound and sustainable platform for its collaborative work at a regional level. While each strand has its unique opportunities and issues, initial development work has shown that each strand should be able to develop a programme that includes action to:

- Develop a regional network or group
- Obtain and share facts and figures and policy information about the strand.
- Plan how to secure enough resources and funds for the longer term
- Develop a presence on a range of strategic bodies
- Work alongside partners in other sectors on equal terms to promote good practice
- Develop programmes that include and enable communication with local and sub-regional as well as regional partners.



Deaf & Disability

Regional Infrastructure	Research and Policy	Sustainability	An equal voice on strategic bodies	Partnership and collaboration	Communications from local to regional
<p>Develop a coalition of disabled and Deaf people to serve the North East</p> <p>Develop a network of organisations which support disabled people and Deaf people, or provide them with services</p> <p>Investigate the need for a coalition or network of carers</p>	<p>Promote the social model of disability</p>	<p>Create an action plan for post March 2009 and seek funding to deliver.</p>	<p>Once established, the Coalition of disabled people and Deaf people will:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide a regional voice of disabled people and Deaf people - Seek to influence regional policy and decision makers, acting as a contact for consultation about policy and services etc - Encourage organisations of disabled people and Deaf people to attend training and build their capacity as activists and leaders - Provide information and access to training 	<p>Once established, the Coalition of disabled people and Deaf people will:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote inclusion and rights of disabled people and Deaf people - Promote awareness about the lives of disabled people and Deaf people and the challenges they face 	<p>The Coalition of disabled people and Deaf people will be made up of a group of networks, each serving a local area</p> <p>Improve communication among disabled people, Deaf people; and their organisations</p> <p>Develop a website</p>

Faith

Regional Infrastructure	Research and Policy	Sustainability	An equal voice on strategic bodies	Partnership and collaboration	Communications from local to regional
<p>Employ a Regional Development Worker</p> <p>Establish terms of reference for the Regional Faith Network</p> <p>Develop sub-regional inter faith networks</p> <p>Develop young people's regional interfaith network</p> <p>Link regional network to UK Interfaith Network & attend their meetings</p>	<p>Research how faith representatives can be more effective and implement findings</p> <p>Respond to government consultations and disseminate and respond to emerging policy and research</p> <p>Research issues for migrant workers and their families</p>	<p>Ensure links to Regional VCS Infrastructure Strategy</p> <p>Access support / funding for sub-regional interfaith bodies and local interfaith initiatives.</p>	<p>Develop working partnerships to manage & deliver the action plan, publicity, dissemination and events</p> <p>Put in place organisational support structures (regional network, guidance for faith reps, information packs, induction systems)</p> <p>Develop professional practice learning and support learning programmes on key themes and topics</p> <p>Hold three regional faiths network events, including 'Women, Culture & Religion'</p>	<p>Highlight the major issues faced by faith communities through a variety of methods</p> <p>Develop and deliver training sessions on how to engage effectively with faith communities</p> <p>Hold fora on homelessness as it affects Gypsies & Travellers, returning Offenders, plus three other specific groups.</p>	<p>Inter faith educational programmes and roadshows in faith centres & colleges of Further Education.</p> <p>Design & develop an inter faith website</p>

Gender

Regional Infrastructure	Research and Policy	Sustainability	An equal voice on strategic bodies	Partnership and collaboration	Communications from local to regional
<p>Establish steering arrangements and terms of reference for regional women's organisations network</p> <p>Administer a capacity building fund for emerging groups</p> <p>Provide a vehicle for ongoing exchange of good practice and networking including web-based exchange.</p> <p>Explore the feasibility of supporting a male-led regional men's network for gender equality.</p>	<p>Produce a statement that summarises the nature and extent of gender inequality in the region</p>	<p>Launch a campaign using the 'Why Women' initiative, as a vehicle for awareness - raising and improving the funding situation for VCS based gender-focussed groups.</p> <p>Create a post to focus on partnership-building and income generation support.</p>	<p>Be a reference point at regional level for consultation on policy and issues affecting women, both economic and social.</p>	<p>Highlight the barriers faced by diverse groups of women and work with them to improve their opportunities.</p> <p>Liaise with women's enterprise partners</p>	<p>Develop a comprehensive directory and calendar of activities of the women's sector, including opportunities to access each other's training, premises.</p> <p>Work with sub-regional lead women's organisations to ensure that local groups are included and consulted through a programme of events and seminars using creative vehicles for learning.</p> <p>Sub-regional leads to host events</p>

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT)

Regional Infrastructure	Research and Policy	Sustainability	An equal voice on strategic bodies	Partnership and collaboration	Communications from local to regional
<p>Establish a steering group to plan a Regional LGBT conference, which will agree priorities for action each year and develop the infrastructure for regional LGBT work.</p> <p>Develop a three year strategic plan for LGBT strand</p> <p>Establish task groups to plan activity around issues or cross-strand work</p> <p>Create safe spaces across the Region</p> <p>Develop clusters of LGBT Groups or single infrastructure body</p>	<p>Develop social capital model for LGBT strand work</p> <p>Develop communications/promotion strategy to include existing publications like CRACK and OUT NE</p>	<p>Secure sustainable funding to deliver three year strategic plan</p>	<p>Develop the capacity within the elements in the strand, particularly transgender</p> <p>Develop sub-regional LGBT networks</p> <p>Develop links between groups within elements in the strand- particularly the Federation of N. E. Lesbian Groups</p> <p>Create compacts with public sector bodies</p> <p>Develop system for spokespersons for strand to contribute to Coalition and to VCS organisations</p>	<p>Develop partnerships with regional agencies</p> <p>Develop a promotion/publicity programme to make non-LGBT organisations aware of strand work</p> <p>Develop work with young people and schools</p> <p>Develop LGBT Business network</p> <p>Support for local groups to tackle some of the issues highlighted at the conference</p>	<p>Organise and / or support various meetings and events</p> <p>Newsletter</p> <p>Update website</p> <p>Develop promotion/publicity programme to ensure we engage with all of LGBT Communities</p>

Race

Regional Infrastructure	Research and Policy	Sustainability	An equal voice on strategic bodies	Partnership and collaboration	Communications from local to regional
<p>Development of BME networks to feed into regional structures</p> <p>Engagement with key decision makers within the public and third sector with regard to dissemination of race equality</p> <p>Bring together regional race equality / BME organisations to work together in partnership ie BECON, NERS, Refugee Forum, CRE/CEHR</p>	<p>Mapping research of the BME sector to show strengths and gaps. E.g. employability, staffing/funding, facilities, involvement in partnerships etc</p>	<p>Strengthen the BME VCS by linking the sector to funding, management, training and networking opportunities</p>	<p>Provide mechanisms for the BME voluntary sector organisations to connect at a strategic level with policy makers</p> <p>Allow the BME VCS to contribute fully to the North East Equality & Diversity Board</p> <p>Work to strengthen the leadership potential of the sector through facilitating and supporting representation, including via the BME reference group</p>	<p>Disseminate good practice on equality throughout the region and facilitate networking between BME groups</p> <p>Partnership working agreements will be formed with BME networks and with organisations where no BME networks exist</p>	<p>Facilitate and support communications from local to regional. A variety of methods will be used including network meetings and consultation sessions</p>

Older Age

Regional Infrastructure	Research and Policy	Sustainability	An equal voice on strategic bodies	Partnership and collaboration	Communications from local to regional
<p>Through Partnership Board and Task Groups engage with key stakeholders and policy makers in private, voluntary and public sectors e.g. 'Older People's Champions' from the NHS Trusts and Local Authorities to inform issues relating to Local Area Agreements.</p> <p>The Years Ahead Partnership Board will consider – particularly in the context of Task Group recommendations – whether there are key regional agencies and organisations that are not currently represented and how this can be best achieved.</p>	<p><i>Years Ahead</i> will address regional issues affected by demographic change or concerned with the health and wellbeing of older people. The main strategic priorities for the next two years focus on partnership working to achieve implementation and dissemination of recommendations from the first round of Task Groups on: Implications of demographic change; Productive ageing and employability; Arts and culture; and the research agenda. Transport and health are the focus of the next task groups.</p>	<p>To re-examine the organisational, structure and activity of Years Ahead to ensure fullest possible engagement with Regional VCS Infrastructure Strategy and older people</p> <p>To make available the model used to develop the regional forum on ageing and current review of governance to other strands For feedback and discussion</p> <p>To further develop the Income Generation strategy set out in the Years Ahead Strategic Plan.</p>	<p>Ensure representation on North East Equality and Diversity Board structures and other regional bodies</p> <p>To be highly involved in the work of the Equalities Coalition and involved in the Networking for Change Project</p> <p>This will include ensuring effective representation of older people in key regional initiatives such as the Ageing and Vitality strand of Science City and the DoH Centre of Excellence on Ageing.</p> <p>Age-proofing regional policy documents and strategies</p>	<p>Highlight the major issues faced by older people and resulting from demographic change through the wide range of networks and organisations identified in the Years Ahead Strategic Plan. - Presentations to key agencies</p> <p>- Conferences and workshops on key issues</p> <p>- Events and training for older people and their organisations</p> <p>To strengthen older people's role in Years Ahead, forge a strong user-led voice on equality and develop more effective participation and collaboration by older people in regional policy making and planning</p>	<p>Further strengthening feedback from and response by older people's organisations as set out in the Years Ahead Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Support of events for older people and their organisations</p> <p>Utilise North East VCS Equalities Coalition website and Years Ahead website</p>

Children & Young People

Regional Infrastructure	Research and Policy	Sustainability	An equal voice on strategic bodies	Partnership and collaboration	Communications from local to regional
<p>Facilitate the development of a regional network bringing together local representatives from the children and young people's VCS, providing a stronger voice to have greater influence on local and regional decision makers</p> <p>Work with agencies in other strands to develop a regional network to raise awareness and campaign on human rights and equality and diversity issues for children and young people</p>	<p>Act as a conduit for sharing information on national, regional and local policy relating to children and young people</p> <p>Collate regional responses to Government consultations and policy initiatives</p> <p>Contribute to the development of new models of monitoring and evaluation which demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of VCS providers</p>	<p>Support the children and young people VCS across the region to help achieve sustainable delivery of services</p> <p>Provide opportunities for VCS agencies to develop the knowledge, skills and expertise required to engage in the opportunities and processes being developed around commissioning</p> <p>Promote the development of markets and models for local purchase of services for children and young people</p>	<p>Strengthen local and regional representation mechanisms to enable effective contribution from children and young people to strategic discussion and development</p> <p>Promote the right of children and young people to have a say on issues that affect them and their lives</p>	<p>Explore the potential for new ways of working in consortia or other partnership arrangements at local, sub-regional or regional level</p> <p>Work with local, regional and national agencies to ensure new initiatives are joined up and have maximum impact within the region</p>	<p>Develop a communication strategy to ensure there is a clear mechanism for sharing information between local and regional level, and between local areas</p> <p>Run regular seminars and briefings around the region which are accessible to local agencies</p>

1.2 To ensure all sectors are working to increase engagement with diverse communities.

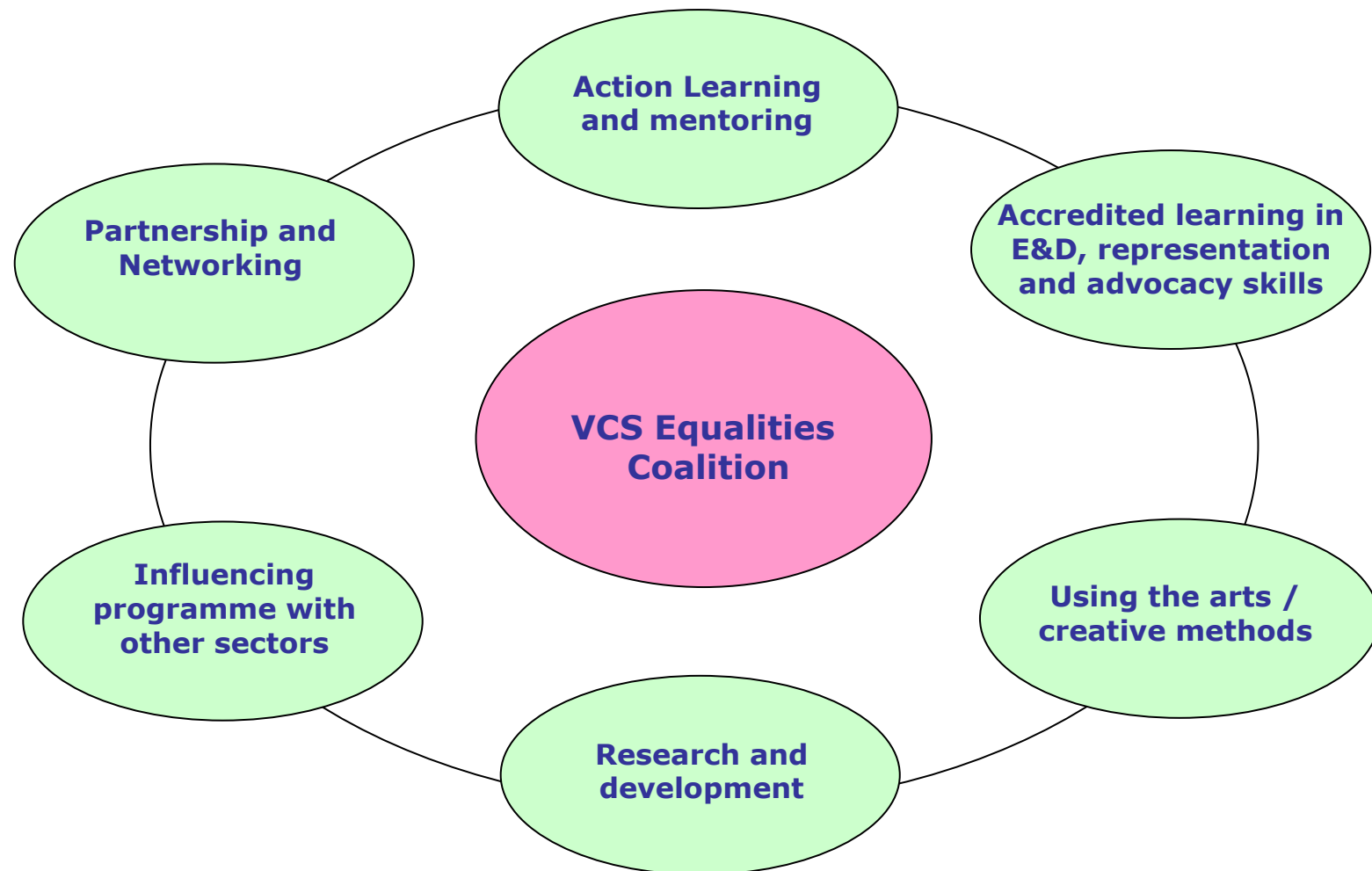
The Coalition will use the Equality & Diversity Boards' action plan relating to leadership as the basis of its own actions in this area. Coalition members are already networked in a range of ways with public and private sector partners, and will seek to enhance these relationships and to extend them where they are less developed. The Coalition also expects support from public and private sectors in taking a much more pro-active role in *leading and hosting* good practice seminars and learning relating to engagement, rather than purely contributing to the initiatives of other sectors.

These activities will form part of the Coalition's core programme, alongside its own efforts to engage and support diverse communities in having a voice, as described below in chart form from the 'leadership' strand of the Equality & Diversity Board action plan:

LEADERSHIP	
<i>Aim: Develop collective regional leadership on equality and diversity to increase the pace of change and engagement with Equality & Diversity within public, private and voluntary sectors.</i>	
Background <i>The achievement of equality and diversity requires engagement with the agenda by all sectors. Only then will discrimination be eliminated, thus improving the lives of those who are currently excluded in many ways in the North East. For this to be effective all sectors should be working to increase the range, quantity and quality of equality related activity. It is important therefore that there is seen to be high level commitment to equality and diversity in all sectors. In addition, it is important to act as exemplars and ensure that people from different equality groups are included in this.</i>	
Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure the importance of equality and diversity is understood across private, public and voluntary sectors • To facilitate the development of high-profile champions for the equality and diversity agenda • To increase leadership capacity in different sectors and communities and embed equality and diversity in the regional approach to leadership 	
Indicators of Success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased profile and high level commitment to equality and diversity within the region. • Development of leadership within different communities including communities of interest. • Role models and exemplars of best practice • Better outcomes for different equality groups (e.g. better rates of participation, improved levels of satisfaction, increased diversity in representation, narrowing of gaps (e.g. pay, health)). 	
Policy Lead	E&D Board
Delivery Partners Include:	Board and Partnership Network
Resource Needs	Equality expertise to support champions. Leadership development work in equality groups and communities.
Funding Sources	CEHR, Lottery, ONE, LSC

1.3 To develop activities to enable E&D communities to network effectively, develop collective voices and work together collaboratively and to engage in civic society – citizenship, representation, engagement in decision-making at local and regional levels.

The Coalition has consulted widely in Phase One of the CADE project using an action research approach to explore how best to offer learning and support to enable an informed collective voice to develop from within excluded communities. This process has highlighted existing good practice as well as addressing gaps and experimenting with new approaches to self advocacy. The resulting DRAFT plan recognises the need for action in a number of ways:



Actions 1.2 & 1.3	Action Learning and mentoring	Partnership and collaboration	Accredited learning in E&D, representation and advocacy skills	Influencing programme with other sectors	Using innovative methods	Research and development	Campaigning
First phase	Host agencies recruited, briefed and offering ongoing mentoring and support to groups and individuals	Build links with Community Empowerment Networks, LAA partnerships	All learning to be accredited and co-facilitated by associate trainers from diverse communities, who will benefit from 'training the trainer' opportunities	Pro-active hosting of seminars and meetings on topical issues, including lead role on 'voice' on regional E&D Board	Time bank / skills exchange: a register of people and agencies offering / wanting expertise, practical help etc	Train and support participatory researchers from each community, building on achievements to date.	Identify strand and other groups' topical issues and concerns and offer Coalition backing through website, briefings.
Second phase	Network of linked local and/or thematic peer support groups for equality advocates	Participation in NETworking for Change activities promoting employer good practice including VCS employers	Building on strand-led training with programme of accredited learning on equality and diversity to promote updates in awareness and understanding of share E&D issues.	Establish system for extending involvement in more meaningful consultation on regional policies, and in ensuring feedback.	Use theatre and the arts as vehicles for inclusive learning	Build links with mainstream research organisations to promote equality-proofing in all research	Build and maintain an independent role to enable freedom to speak on issues of concern, including own legal status

Third phase	Community based Equality Practitioner network with Networks Worker	Develop jointly-led projects with other sectors and between VCS partners e.g. Partners in Policy Making	Programme of accredited learning on representation and advocacy and having a say	Invite public and private sector diversity champions to meet regularly with diversity groups	Explore new ways of networking both web-based and other to ensure maximum participation	Seek opportunities for Coalition members to advise on implementation of research recommendations – ‘consultancy’ role to help future sustainability	Establish Coalition Campaigns worker
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The full delivery of this core programme over the next 3 years will require:

1. A core staff team of 3 including:
 - Contract coordinator / sustainability worker
 - Coalition development / networking / campaigns worker
 - Information / research / administration
2. Training lead body with OCN approved centre status and relevant expertise in equality and diversity, supported by a team of freelance trainers with E&D appropriate skills and knowledge.
3. Web presence, including active links on VONNE, Equality North East, national E&D Forum, and strand lead’s websites; as well as more experimental web-based networking opportunities
4. Web-based time bank / skills exchange, with administrative coordination.
5. Publicity
6. Some flexibility in funds to support host agencies, shadowing / mentoring costs
7. Project funding to enable continued innovation and experimentation, and to host new roles e.g. for CEHR
8. Governance costs
9. Dedicated premises, meeting space and related costs.