

# Assessing Engagement with the Voluntary and Community Sector

A mini self-evaluation tool

The self-evaluation tool is an initiative that has been developed by VCS Engage, with input from local authority and VCS advisory partners. VCS Engage is a programme funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to strengthen the engagement of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in delivering the Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda. VCS Engage is steered by a consortium of infrastructure and delivery organisations working in the children, young people and families voluntary and community sector; and supported by a large number of individual agencies that are committed to working as part of the programme.

Members of the consortium are:

- National Children's Bureau (NCB)
- National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO)
- National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)
- National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)
- Parenting UK
- Family Welfare Association (FWA)
- NCH

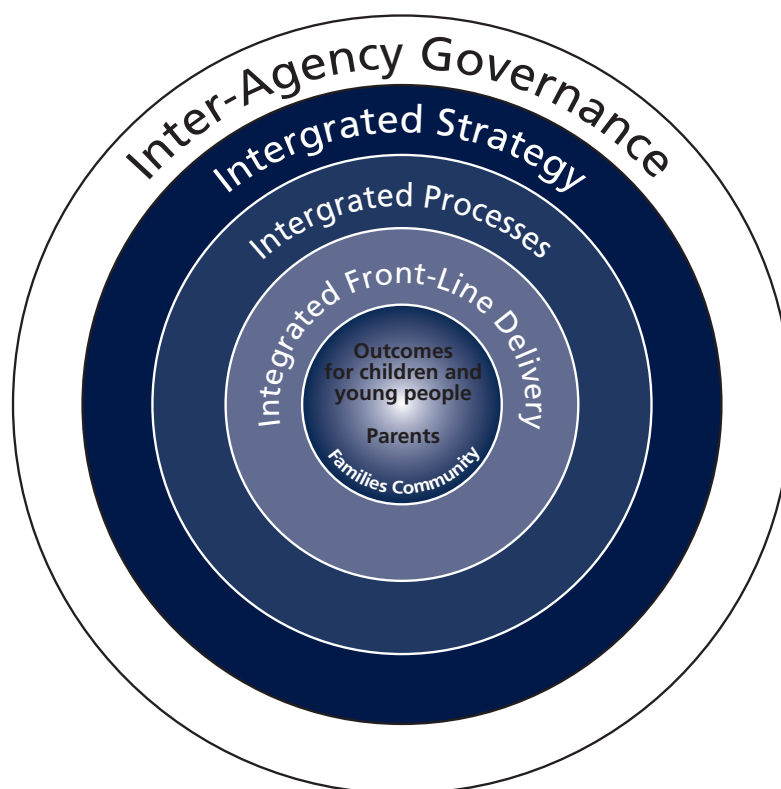
# Self-evaluation tool

## Aim

This self-evaluation tool (SET) is designed to support those responsible for planning and delivering services through children's trusts, to review their existing levels of engagement with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and identify areas for further development.

## Background

The SET is an initiative that has been developed through the VCS Engage programme. The four areas for assessment within the tool are organised under the headings of what has become known as the DCSF 'onion'. This aims to ensure that integrated working will lead to improved outcomes for children, young people, their parents, families and communities.



The SET also aims to provide evidence of achievement against the national outcome and indicator sets and, more specifically, NI 7: 'Environment for a thriving third sector'.

## How to complete the Self-evaluation tool

The SET is designed to be completed in partnership with statutory and voluntary sector representatives. Within each section, there are a number of questions for discussion which require partners to consider their progress, provide evidence for their judgements and then establish ratings of green, amber or red as a baseline. The SET then provides a template for establishing agreed further actions and a communications process to disseminate this with wider stakeholders.

## Further support

The VCS Engage programme aims to strengthen the engagement of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda (more details can be obtained at [www.vcsengage.org.uk](http://www.vcsengage.org.uk)). The programme is funded by the DCSF.

## Guidance notes

The following guidance notes will help you to assess the level of engagement based on the responses you have given in the self-evaluation document. As well as being examples of what might be assessed, the suggestions can also be added to or tailored to develop your own measures of engagement and examples of good practice.

You should aim to answer the questions with your VCS organisations before looking at this guidance. This will give you a more honest picture of the level of engagement within the VCS. You will also be able to work together with partner organisations to come up with agreed assessment on new areas not included in the SET Guidance.

There is a more detailed self-evaluation toolkit, available from VCS Engage, for those who want to undertake an in-depth assessment of VCS engagement with the voluntary and community sector within their local authority. This will be available on the website, or by contacting VCS Engage.

The assessment is measured using a traffic light system:

- Green** – Good to best practice
- Amber** – Meets minimum standards
- Red** – Needs significant improvement, or 'Not known'

## Inter-agency governance

NB: These are examples of practice and are not aimed to be all-inclusive.

<i>To what extent does the children's trust/partnership ensure meaningful engagement of the VCS?</i>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The authority and other partners actively promote the role of the VCS in the trust/partnership.</li> <li>• There is effective representation of the VCS in partnership arrangements.</li> <li>• Resources are allocated to support the appropriate representation of the VCS.</li> <li>• A strategy is in place for consulting a range of VCS organisations about partnership decisions and priority setting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VCS has representation on the partnership and a mechanism is in place to consult other VCS organisations about the work of the trust or partnership.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS representation is intermittent and/or has not been agreed with the range of local VCS organisations.</li> <li>• Larger VCS organisations or one VCS representative tend(s) to dominate.</li> </ul>
<i>How does the trust/partnership ensure the diversity of representation of the VCS in both the vision and priorities for the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP)?</i>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The trust/partnership's practice is to seek the involvement of a wide range of VCS organisations in updating the vision and the priorities.</li> <li>• The authority or partnership has funded a VCS Link/Development Officer.</li> <li>• Elected members as well as officers seek the views of local VCS organisations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VCS was consulted about the vision for Every Child Matters (ECM) and some VCS representatives have had opportunities to participate in decisions about priorities.</li> <li>• The lead member for children and young people is aware of need for VCS involvement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The involvement of the VCS in the vision for Every Child Matters (ECM) has been limited and there have not been any planned opportunities to engage with the VCS about priorities for the CYPP.</li> </ul>
<i>How does the trust/partnership ensure that the VCS is involved in developing shared values and ethos around working practice?</i>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The children's partnership has developed shared partnership principles and the VCS has participated in the development of the values and ethos for the partnership.</li> <li>• Agreed values and ethos are communicated to all known VCS organisations.</li> <li>• There is a key senior management contact or 'champion' for the VCS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS representatives have been involved in developing the shared values and ethos as set out in the partnership standards/principles.</li> <li>• Communication of shared values and ethos has included key VCS organisations but not a wider cross-section.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VCS has had little or no involvement in the development of shared values and ethos.</li> <li>• Main VCS contacts have received information about values and ethos, but not been asked to comment.</li> </ul>

## Integrated strategy

<i>How has the VCS been involved in shaping the commissioning process?</i>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The trust/partnership involves the VCS in the development and maintenance of the new commissioning framework.</li> <li>• VCS representatives have participated in decision making about resource allocation, pooling budgets, joint risk taking and bidding.</li> <li>• The VCS is fully involved in the design of the move from grants to commissioning and the preparation for potential decommissioning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VCS is involved in some aspects of the commissioning framework.</li> <li>• The VCS has had some involvement in the planning to move from grants to commissioned services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VCS has had limited involvement in designing the commissioning framework.</li> <li>• The VCS has not been adequately involved in the planning to move from grants to commissioned services, or the design of arrangements to assist small VCS organisations in coping with this transition.</li> </ul>
<i>How has the VCS been involved in updating the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) through both needs analysis and resources mapping?</i>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The trust/partnership seeks the full involvement of a cross-section of the VCS in agreeing objectives and targets for updating the CYPP and monitoring progress.</li> <li>• Needs analysis work has fully involved the VCS.</li> <li>• Resource mapping has been based on identifying and contacting a wide range of local organisations offering provision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VCS has contributed to the original and updated CYPP through a representative on the relevant group.</li> <li>• Larger VCS organisations or representatives of a VCS forum were asked to contribute to the overall needs analysis work.</li> <li>• Some local VCS providers have been identified in the resource mapping work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VCS has had little or no involvement in CYPP preparation and updating.</li> <li>• The needs analysis activity did not involve the VCS on a planned basis.</li> <li>• The resource mapping work has not contacted local organisations to check lists of local providers.</li> </ul>

**How is the VCS engaged in local safeguarding children's boards (LSCB)?**

Green	Amber	Red
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS representation on the LSCB covers both large and small organisations.</li> <li>• There is a systematic approach to ensuring that all VCS providers receive guidance on roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>• Subsidised/free training is offered to all small VCS providers, appropriately.</li> <li>• VCS development officers have the capacity to ensure the sector is fully engaged and contributing to the safeguarding/staying safe agenda.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LSCB has a nominated officer who advises partner organisations on safeguarding/welfare matters.</li> <li>• The VCS is represented on the LSCB.</li> <li>• LSCB policies and guidance on roles and responsibilities of all agencies is available to VCS organisations.</li> <li>• Training is advertised to VCS at low costs.</li> <li>• Each VCS provider has a nominated person responsible for safeguarding.</li> <li>• Consideration is being given as to how to facilitate information sharing across all VCS providers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VCS has no regular representation on the LSCB, and/or the LSCB has not been proactive in seeking VCS involvement.*</li> <li>• VCS organisations have not received clear guidance about their responsibilities for safeguarding and welfare.</li> <li>• Small VCS providers do not have access to affordable training.</li> </ul> <p>* Where NSPCC is present their role is not normally about representing the VCS.</p>

**What role has the VCS had in developing a shared workforce strategy?**

Green	Amber	Red
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS has participated in the development of the Children's Workforce Strategy.</li> <li>• Skills audits of current workforce include a wide range of VCS organisations.</li> <li>• Comprehensive inter-agency training is open to VCS and includes training for leaders.</li> <li>• Flexible access to qualifications for VCS staff is being considered/developed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's Workforce Strategy has been developed by the local authority and local health trust with some VCS consultation.</li> <li>• Some VCS organisations have been involved in the skills audits of current workforce.</li> <li>• VCS staff has access to some inter-agency training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS has not been involved in the development of Children's Workforce Strategy.</li> <li>• Skills audit of current workforce has not included VCS.</li> <li>• Training opportunities for VCS staff have focused on safeguarding only.</li> </ul>

## Integrated processes

NB: These are examples of practice and are not aimed to be all-inclusive.

<b><i>What has the role of the VCS been in the development and implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)?</i></b>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A CAF is ready to be fully implemented across the authority from April 2008.</li> <li>• Local training has included VCS staff involved in service delivery.</li> <li>• VCS staff have been prepared for the lead professional role and are involved in Team About the Child (TAC) meetings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAF has been piloted and may be ready to be implemented from April 2008.</li> <li>• Some VCS staff have been involved but there is no strategy in place for VCS staff training and preparation for lead professional role.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS has had little or no involvement in CAF development.</li> <li>• Training for CAF has not been offered to local VCS staff.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Are information sharing protocols in place and do these include the VCS?</i></b>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information protocols are developed with VCS involvement at all stages.</li> <li>• The protocol provides training for a range of VCS staff.</li> <li>• Plans are being developed/in place to provide VCS organisations with access to the IT needed for information sharing to work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is some VCS involvement in the development of information sharing protocols.</li> <li>• Some VCS staff have had access to training on information sharing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is limited or no VCS involvement in the development of information sharing protocols.</li> <li>• There is limited or no involvement of VCS staff in training on information sharing.</li> <li>• There is little or no understanding of the issues for the VCS organisations regarding IT for information sharing.</li> </ul>
<b><i>What level of involvement has the VCS had in developing a performance and quality assurance strategy for the delivery of the Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP)?</i></b>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS representatives are involved in the development of the performance management strategy.</li> <li>• There are clear lines of accountability in VCS organisations for outputs and outcomes.</li> <li>• Performance measures have been agreed and are being used by VCS providers.</li> <li>• The authority/partnership supports VCS organisations in performance management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some VCS organisations have clear lines of accountability for performance management and use of agreed performance measures.</li> <li>• Some data and information is shared with VCS providers to help focus on value for money.</li> <li>• The authority/partnership provides performance management support to a limited number of key VCS providers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS providers are expected to participate in performance management, but without a clear understanding of performance measures.</li> <li>• Lines of accountability in VCS organisations are not clear and access to partnership data is not consistent across VCS providers.</li> <li>• The authority/partnership has no arrangements to support VCS providers in performance management.</li> </ul>

## Integrated front line delivery

NB: These are examples of practice and are not aimed to be all-inclusive.

<i>How does the trust or partnership actively encourage the VCS to play a role in the delivery of integrated children's services?</i>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The trust/partnership has a transparent process for commissioning.</li> <li>• Support is available to smaller/medium-sized VCS organisations to put together bids for new commissioned work.</li> <li>• Larger VCS organisations or VCS umbrella organisations/ infrastructure organisations have been commissioned/ funded to help smaller ones.</li> <li>• The development of transparent processes for monitoring value for money takes into account the different sizes of VCS organisations.</li> <li>• Service specifications and contracts reflect the 'value added' aspect that VCS organisations can bring.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VCS has received information about new commissioning/tendering processes from the partnership/authority.</li> <li>• Briefing sessions have explained what is required of VCS organisations.</li> <li>• It has been suggested that VCS organisations can work together to prepare bids.</li> <li>• Transparent processes for monitoring value for money are in place, but with little account of the different sizes of VCS organisations and VCS capacity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little or no support has been offered to VCS organisations to help them to respond to new requirements for contracted/commissioned services.</li> <li>• No account has been taken of the ability of small VCS organisations to complete bids for service delivery.</li> </ul>
<i>What action has been taken by the partnership to support the VCS to improve the sustainability of their services?</i>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The partnership/authority has consulted with the VCS and agreed to offer commissioned contracts over a three-year period.</li> <li>• Contracts prioritise prevention/early intervention.</li> <li>• The VCS staff involved in the delivery of commissioned contracts have access to workforce development opportunities.</li> <li>• VCS providers are encouraged and supported to collaborate with each other over back office functions, IT, premises, shared posts and also to collaborate with other partners, including the authority.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The partnership/authority is seeking to extend the length of new contracts beyond the one-year grant-aid period.</li> <li>• VCS providers are informed of some workforce development opportunities.</li> <li>• The advantages of collaboration across VCS providers are highlighted to encourage more efficient delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The partnership/authority has not yet reached agreement about the duration of new contracts.</li> <li>• Consideration has not been given to developing the skills of VCS staff over the length of a contract.</li> <li>• Little or no work has been done on encouraging VCS organisations to share resources/functions.</li> </ul>

<b>What role has the VCS taken in locality working and the development of area-based networks?</b>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS organisations are an active component of multi-agency arrangements on the basis of neighbourhoods or clusters.</li> <li>• VCS practitioners are encouraged to become lead professionals and have access to training and support to fulfil this role.</li> <li>• VCS involvement has been integral to the development of children’s centres and extended services for schools.</li> <li>• Locality-based commissioning and services reflect the full range of VCS providers in the area.</li> <li>• VCS representatives are involved in the management of locality teams.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS representatives are included in each locality team, and are resourced.</li> <li>• VCS organisations have some involvement in the development of children’s centres/extended services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCS representatives are involved in some locality teams, but not in others.</li> <li>• There is no consistent rationale for their involvement.</li> <li>• Some local organisations or their partners are unclear as to why they should be participating at this level.</li> </ul>

## SET Assessment Questions

### 1. Inter-agency governance

Questions:

- To what extent does the children's trust or partnership ensure sustained and meaningful engagement of the VCS?
- Within this, how does the trust/ partnership ensure the diversity of representation from the VCS in both the vision and priorities for the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP)?
- How does the trust/partnership ensure that the VCS are involved in developing shared values and a shared ethos around working practices?

*Evidence*

*Areas for development*

Red	Amber	Green

## 2. Integrated strategy

Questions:

- How have the VCS been involved in shaping the commissioning strategy?
- How have the VCS been involved in updating the CYPP plan both through the needs analysis and resources mapping?
- How is the VCS engaged in local safeguarding children developments?
- What role has the VCS had in developing a shared workforce strategy?

**Evidence**

**Areas for development**

Red	Amber	Green

### 3. Integrated processes

**Questions:**

- What has been the VCS role in the development and implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)?
- Are information sharing protocols in place and do these include the VCS ?
- What level of involvement has the VCS had in developing a performance and quality assurance strategy for the delivery of the CYPP?

**Evidence**

**Areas for development**

Red	Amber	Green

**4. Integrated front line delivery**

**Questions:**

- How does the trust/partnership actively encourage the VCS to play a role in the delivery of integrated children’s services?
- What action has been taken by the trust/partnership to support the VCS to improve the sustainability of their services?
- What has been the role of the VCS in locality working and the development of area based networks?

**Evidence**

**Areas for development**

<b>Red</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Green</b>

## Actions

What specific and measurable actions will be taken forward from this review?

<i>Area for development</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
1. Inter-agency governance		
2. Integrated strategy		
3. Integrated processes		
4. Integrated front line delivery		

## Communications process

- How will the SET be shared at a strategic level?
- How will this review be communicated to wider statutory and voluntary sector partners?
- What will be the process for reviewing the action plan and a timescale for this?

*Signatures*

*Date*

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