

Why ARC-GM Signed the Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord: Strengthening Partnerships with Communities



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At the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Greater Manchester (ARC-GM) we know that the best health and care research doesn't happen behind closed doors. It happens when researchers work alongside the people and communities whose experiences, insights and expertise can help shape better solutions to real-world challenges.

We also know that too many communities facing the greatest inequalities are not well represented in research, and the community organisations that support their involvement are often expected to contribute significant time and expertise without equal influence or recognition. As a partnership committed to improving health and wellbeing across Greater Manchester, we want to help change that.

The challenges facing health and care cannot be solved by any one organisation alone. By signing the Greater Manchester Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Accord, ARC-GM is reaffirming its commitment to working alongside communities, researchers, health and care partners, and the voluntary sector to create research that is inclusive, meaningful and impactful. The Accord reflects our shared commitment to stronger partnerships, more equitable ways of working, and recognising communities as equal partners in research and innovation.

What is the GM VCFSE Accord?

[Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord 2026 -2035](#) is a formal agreement between public sector organisations and the VCFSE sector that sets out how they will work together as equal partners to improve outcomes for people and communities across Greater Manchester. It is based on shared values of trust, honesty, accountability and ambition

The renewed 2026–2035 Accord focuses on three key commitments:

- **Involve and Devolve** – increasing community influence in decision-making and sharing power more effectively.
- **Resource and Enable** – ensuring VCFSE organisations are properly supported and resourced.
- **Recognise and Value** – acknowledging the expertise, insight and contribution of community organisations and treating them as equal partners.



Why did ARC-GM want to sign up?

As an NIHR-funded Applied Research Collaboration, ARC-GM exists to improve health and care through applied research and by helping evidence be adopted into practice. We know that this can only be achieved when communities are involved from the beginning. Through our work and initiatives such as the Greater Manchester Research Engagement Network ([GM REN](#)), we see first-hand the barriers that can prevent underrepresented communities, particularly those facing the greatest health inequalities, from taking part in research.

We know that people with lived experience can and should help shape decisions at every level, and that the VCFSE sector plays a vital role in making this possible. VCFSE organisations are trusted voices within their communities, providing facilitation and accessible, safe spaces for people to engage. By working together, we can make research more relevant, accessible and trusted by the communities it is intended to help.

Signing the GM VCFSE Accord means taking practical steps to improve how we work. We know that changing ways of working takes time and that we will not always get everything right, but signing the Accord demonstrates our commitment to building mutually beneficial partnerships between our research teams, VCFSE sector colleagues and communities.

This includes:

- **Strengthening community voices** within our research governance and decision-making. We have VCFSE representation on our Partnership Board, Theme and Project Advisory Groups.
- **Ensuring community and VCFSE partners are properly recognised and reimbursed** for their time and expertise, using the principles of the GM Fair Funding Protocol and NIHR Public Involvement guidance.
- **Building funding for community involvement and VCFSE sector organisations** into research grants and programmes.
- **Making research more accessible** by holding research meetings in community spaces and booking community assets.
- **Developing knowledge exchange, mentoring and learning opportunities** between researchers and VCFSE staff, supporting the sharing of expertise, lived experience and evidence to strengthen research relevance and community impact. This includes supporting community researchers, participatory approaches and skills development in data collection and analysis, helping both sectors build capacity, learn from one another, and better capture and demonstrate the difference their work makes to communities.
- **Recognising and celebrating contributions** through communications, feedback and recognition in publications, reports and news stories, for example.

- **Supporting Community Research Champion roles** to enable community members who want to take a leadership role to support others in their communities to become involved in research.

Ultimately, our goal is simple: to ensure that research is done with communities and in partnership with the VCFSE sector, so that the benefits of research are shared more fairly across Greater Manchester and beyond.

The Accord celebration event on 8th July was a valuable opportunity to reflect on the importance of these partnerships and the shared commitment across Greater Manchester to working differently.

Together, we can build a research culture that values partnership, promotes equity, and delivers better outcomes for everyone.



Find out more about the accord here:

<https://www.vcfseleadershipgm.org.uk/accord/accord-home>