

JOB DESCRIPTION

Community Research & Engagement Associate

- **Freelance associate role**
- **Flexible and primarily remote/home-based**
- **Some travel across Somerset will be required to support meetings, events and community activity**
- **Hosted by Spark Somerset**
- **Reporting to the Research Manager, with support from the Head of Partnerships**
- **Budget: £10,000 inclusive of VAT and associated costs (e.g. travel, connectivity, materials etc)**
- **Anticipated time: approx. two days per week for around six to seven months**

We're on a mission to help change lives and build healthy, resilient communities in Somerset.

We do this by supporting and championing voluntary and community organisations and providing a range of services, training and advice. We also believe that everyone should have the opportunity to thrive and so we work with local partners to provide volunteering opportunities for all.

Pivotal to our success in this mission is our talented team, who work proactively to support local organisations and residents, driving quality across the sector and influencing local developments creating opportunities for the VCFSE to grow and thrive.

About the role

We are looking for a warm, organised and community-minded Community Research & Engagement Associate to support a growing programme of research, involvement, engagement and participation activity across Somerset's VCFSE sector.

The role will support activity linked to Somerset's Research Engagement Network (REN), Somerset HDRC (Health Determinants Research Collaboration) and wider research, partnership and engagement activity across Spark Somerset. The postholder will play an important role in helping strengthen connections between communities, VCFSE organisations and research partners, ensuring community voices and experiences help shape future research and engagement activity.

This role sits at the intersection of community development, engagement and research. Rather than delivering research directly, the focus is on building confidence, relationships and practical routes into community research, participation, involvement and engagement.

Working alongside VCFSE organisations, community networks, researchers and wider partners, the postholder will help coordinate forums, Lunch & Learns, training sessions and community conversations; support organisations to navigate research and engagement opportunities and help translate complex information into accessible, practical and community-friendly approaches.

This is a flexible and evolving role suited to somebody who has an interest in research, participation and community engagement, and enjoys connecting people, organising meaningful activity, facilitating conversations and helping ideas turn into practical action.

The role will report to the Research Manager, with wider support from the Head of Partnerships.

Key activities and responsibilities

Research engagement and community connections

- Support research, engagement and participation activity across Somerset's VCFSE sector
- Help build awareness and confidence around research and participation opportunities within communities and VCFSE organisations
- Support VCFSE organisations to navigate and engage with appropriate opportunities, partnerships and networks
- Help strengthen relationships between communities, VCFSE organisations, researchers, project leads and wider system partners

Coordination, training and facilitation

- Help coordinate research and engagement forums, lunch & learns, training sessions and networking activities
- Support the development of accessible resources and materials
- Work with partners to identify emerging topics, learning needs, areas of support and opportunities across the sector
- Support trusted community leaders and frontline staff to feel confident discussing and signposting research and engagement opportunities

Community insight

- Support community conversations, engagement activity and insight-gathering linked to research, lived experience and wider community priorities
- Help capture learning and insight from VCFSE organisations and communities to inform future activity, partnerships and areas of development
- Contribute to short case examples, shared learning and reflective outputs demonstrating community influence, engagement and impact
- Support approaches that encourage diverse perspectives and inclusive participation

Partnership and programme support

- Support communication and shared learning between VCFSE organisations, project leads, researchers and wider partners
- Keep an eye on emerging opportunities, developments and conversations across research, health, community and voluntary sector networks, helping ensure relevant learning, intelligence and opportunities are shared with VCFSE organisations and partners
- Contribute to the development of forums, partnerships and collaborative activity across the programme
- Help maintain organised, collaborative and responsive ways of working
- Support wider engagement, partnership and community participation activity across Spark Somerset where appropriate

Who we're looking for

We are looking for somebody who is organised, approachable and comfortable working across community, voluntary sector and research environments.

You do not need to come from a traditional academic research background, but you should have an interest in research and an understanding of how community insight,

lived experience and participation can help shape better services, research and decision-making.

We are looking for someone who is confident building relationships, coordinating activity, facilitating conversations and translating information into accessible, practical language.

You will likely enjoy:

- Gathering insight and understanding what matters to people and communities
- Connecting people and ideas
- Organising meaningful activity
- Helping people feel confident and included
- Working collaboratively across different sectors and communities
- Turning conversations into practical next steps
- Working flexibly within evolving projects and partnerships

Essential experience and skills

- Experience of supporting or facilitating research, consultation, engagement, participation, involvement, co-production or insight-gathering activities
- Experience working with community groups, voluntary organisations or partnerships
- Strong communication and relationship-building skills
- Confidence coordinating meetings, events, workshops or community activity
- Ability to communicate complex information in accessible and practical ways
- Good organisational skills and ability to manage multiple strands of activity
- Ability to work independently whilst also collaborating with others
- Confidence using online platforms and digital communication tools

Desirable experience

- Understanding of the VCFSE sector in Somerset or similar settings
- Experience supporting workshops, training or facilitation activity
- Familiarity with research, public involvement or lived experience work
- Experience producing accessible resources, case studies or community-facing materials

Diversity and inclusivity

A diverse voice is a more powerful voice. Diversity in our people brings new viewpoints; driving debate, encouraging creativity, and helping us to engage with new audiences to achieve the greatest impact in our communities. As such, we encourage applications from people who belong to groups which are often marginalised in society.

To apply:

To apply, please submit to recruitment@sparksomerset.org.uk your CV and covering letter or a short response (written, audio or video - whatever feels most comfortable) to the prompts below:

1. What interests you about this role and the type of work described?
2. Tell us a little about any experience you've had working with communities, voluntary organisations, partnerships, engagement activity, research or insight-gathering.
3. This role involves helping make research, involvement and engagement opportunities feel more accessible to communities and VCFSE organisations. How would you approach that?
4. This role involves lots of coordination, communication and relationship-building. Can you tell us about a time you helped bring people together around a shared piece of work, challenge or opportunity?

We recognise that relevant experience can come from many different routes, including community development, engagement, involvement, participation, lived experience, voluntary sector and research-related roles. If you're unsure whether your experience is a good fit, we'd encourage you to get in touch for an informal conversation.

For more information about the role or an informal chat, please contact Olly Clabburn by emailing olly.clabburn@sparksomerset.org.uk.

Closing date: Friday 31 July

Interviews: Tuesday 11 August