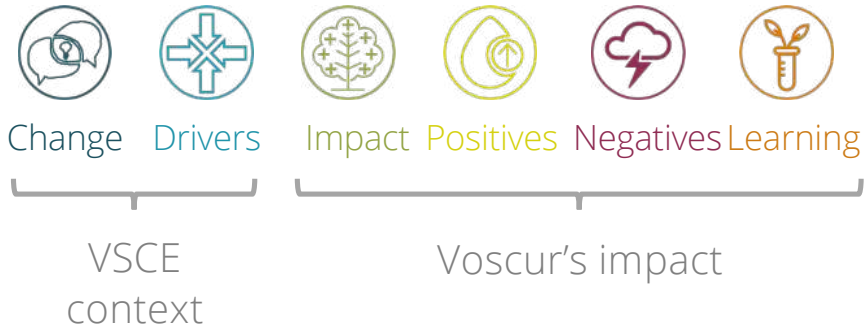




Strengthening Bristol's social economy

An evaluation of Voscur's impact on VSCE organisations and a 'deep dive' into changes and drivers of change in the VSCE sector



Introduction

This summary presents the key findings from a study evaluating Voscur's impact on in the **voluntary, community and social enterprise** (VCSE) sector in Bristol conducted in 2019 using the Qualitative Impact Protocol (**QuIP**). Independent researchers conducted interviews with 24 individual respondents representing 24 organisations working in the VCSE ecosystem in Bristol, asking them specifically about their **stories of change**.

To avoid confirmation bias, the research took an **exploratory** approach. The respondents and even the researchers did not know what specific outcomes were expected as a result of Voscur's work. The interviews were designed to be open to any kind of change and any drivers of change. This helped to ensure that all potential drivers of change were captured, rather than only those pertaining to Voscur's work.



Causal Map software was used to analyse the respondents' **stories**. Coding the narrative data in the app helped to summarise respondents' views of how change has happened and Voscur's role in the context of other drivers of change. The maps also helped to identify subgroups of respondents with different views and experiences.

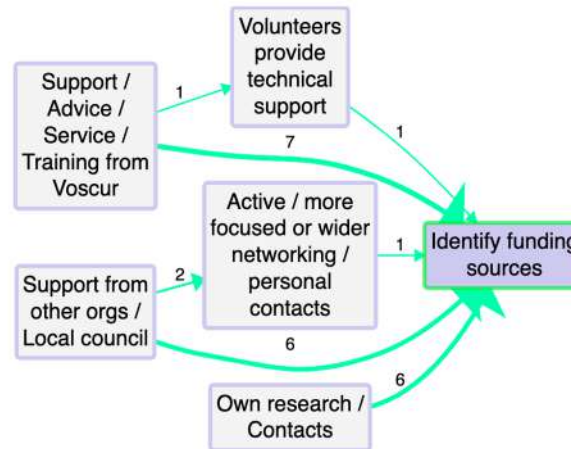




Causal Maps

Interpreting the causal map

Causal maps act as a visualisation of the causal connections made by the respondents in the study. The number above the arrow indicates how many times the link (from the **influence** factor, to the consequence **factor**) in question was made.



An example, simplified map

Analysing the causal map

Causal maps can be filtered in a number of ways, for example by the age of respondents or to show the part of the global map near to a particular factor. Various filters have been used on each map pictured in this report.





Access to funding: More funding due to organisational changes

Half the respondents reported an **increase in overall income**, whilst the other half reported their income had stayed the same or decreased.

- Some organisations reported a positive collaborative relationship with their funders.
- Some respondents explained how access to funding was influenced by changes to **image/branding**, increased visibility, becoming a community interest company (CIC), and **more collaboration with other organisations**.

Access to funding was cited as leading to other positive changes, most commonly improved/broadened services, and better/more help for clients, as well as capacity to plan, strategize, and fundraise.

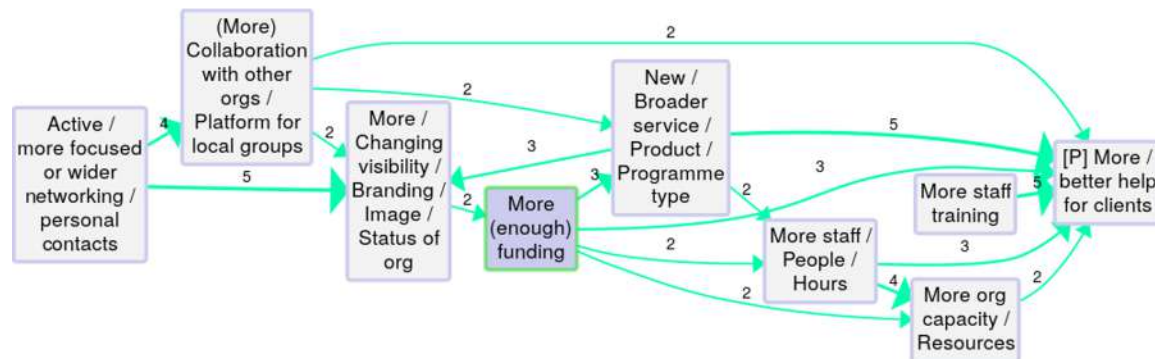
AQ-50: We became a community interest company which opened up a lot of funding streams we didn't have access to before. Which meant that we could expand on what we were delivering.

CS-20: The funding to do the energy certificates we got through Quartet. They also funded our time to get together our portfolio of evidence as well as travel and accommodation costs.



Map: Access to funding

(map shows links which were mentioned at least 2 times)



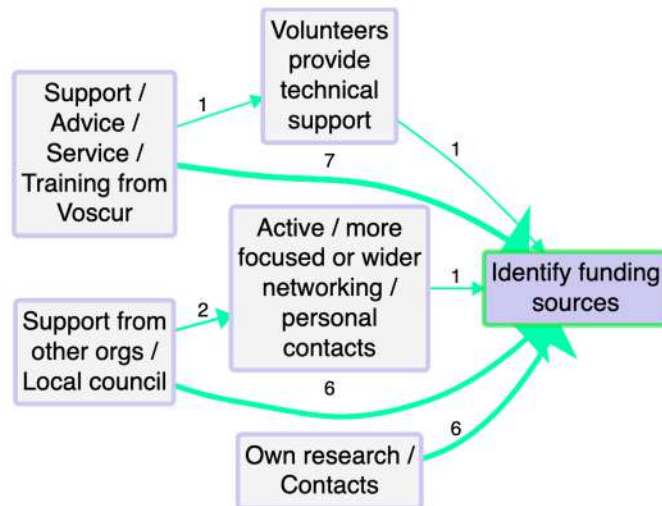


Access to funding: Support services are helping to identify funding sources

Organisations explained the various ways in which they seek out funding, from **researching online** to **networking** with key contacts.

Support from Voscur and other organisations were cited several times as helping to identify sources through **directories**, **newsletters** and **bulletins** via email/social media.

Map: Identifying funding sources



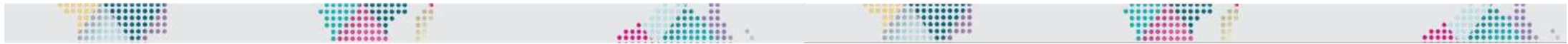
CQ-13: We receive round robins from Voscur on funding opportunities but they usually have short deadlines.

AQ-50: Voscur website is very good for funding and small pots of money.



Some organisations mentioned being able to recruit new fundraising teams or use interns/volunteers to support searches. Other organisations didn't have any in-house funding role or fundraising expertise.

AQ-52: We have no third sector experience to tap into, and currently no fundraiser, so we just use common sense. We've had funding from the Lottery Fund and identify trusts through general bulletins from Voscur and Coops UK. We got very good support from Voscur who ran a Picture Project where we had 5 mins to sketch out our idea to an audience of 200. We were one of the successful projects.





Service delivery: Expansion driven by funding, partnerships and demand

Many organisations described changes to their services such as **delivering new activities** or **expanding current programmes**. Changes mentioned include: introducing different training courses, switching to online training, setting up and using social media platforms/forums, increasing social activities, and establishing support groups in new areas or for new clients.

Access to funding was a key driver enabling these developments. Another influential factor was working in **collaboration or partnership** with other organisations, even if this was initially a response to funding requirements. Organisations also talked about adapting or scaling services **based on the needs** and wants of their clients. For some, starting to use survey research and feedback forms helped inform these decisions.

Some felt demand had been exacerbated by the context of **political or social issues**, such as service withdrawal from council/other charities as a result of budget cuts/austerity.

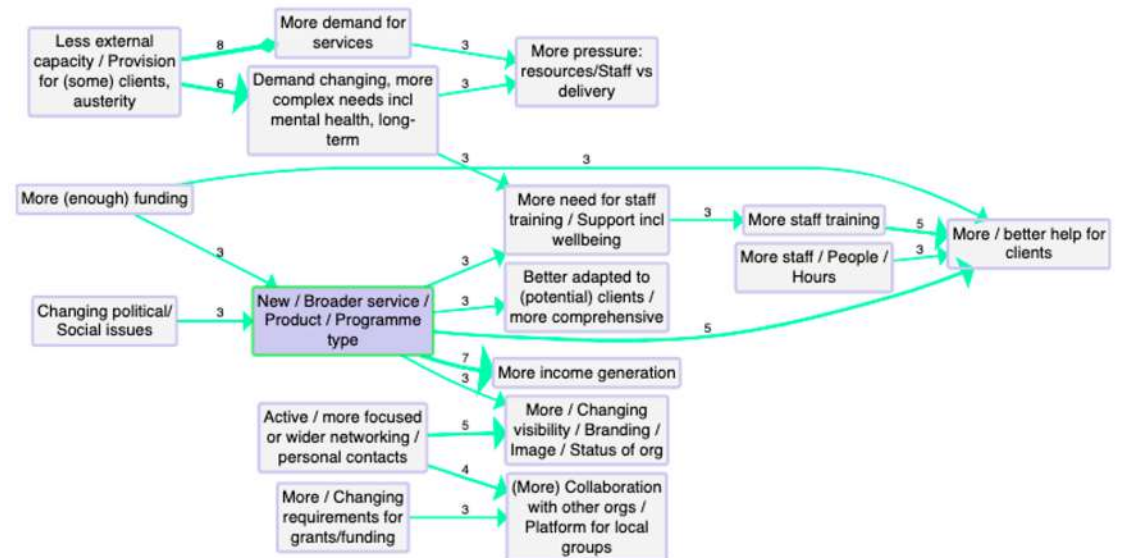
Overall, organisations felt these **services were better able to support their clients**.



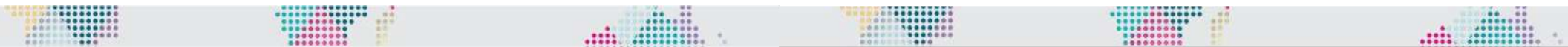
A few organisations had acquired access to a **building** which had a huge impact on what they were able to offer.

Map: expanding services

(map shows links which were mentioned at least 2 times)



16 organisations said that they had introduced a new programme or broadened their service in some way



People and skills: Staff training improving service to clients

In addition to board members, staff across different levels of organisations have benefitted from in-house and external **training** from Voscur and other organisations. Different types of training include **face-to-face** sessions and **online courses**.

Training led to better **skills for staff** as well as **improved services for clients**.

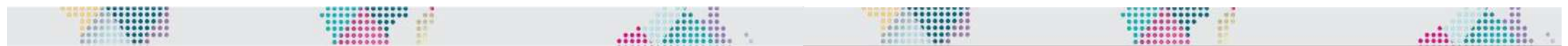
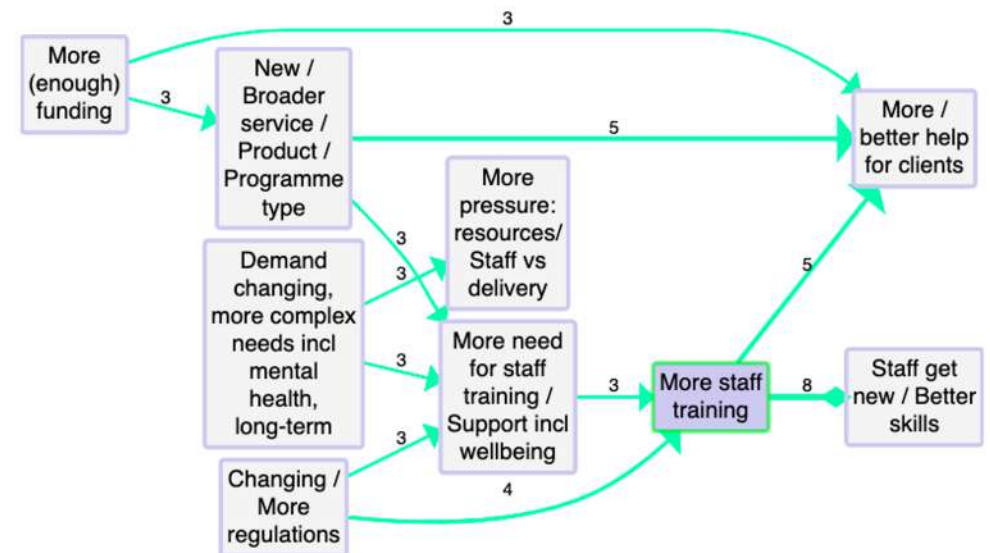
Key factors driving the need for more training included **changing regulations** (e.g. GDPR and UC) and **increased complexity** of client needs.



14 organisations said that their staff had received some form of training

BS-34: We try to find the cost-effective ones [training courses] like Voscur.

Map: More staff training





Influence: Networking and building connections

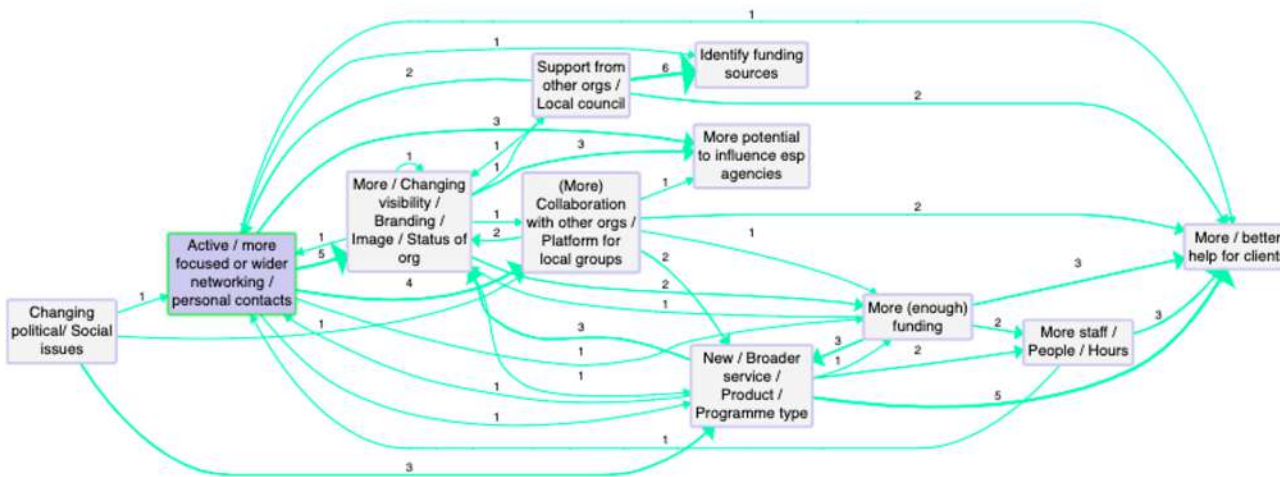
A small number of organisations said they had reduced their networking due to lack of funding/resources; however, many organisations continued to network with others which better enabled them to **raise awareness** and **influence** others.

Organisations mentioned connecting with others such as **MPs** and other organisations within their relevant spheres.

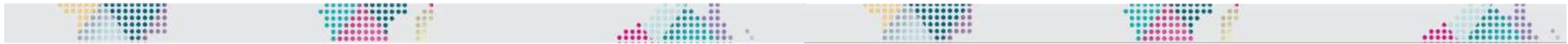
Local, regional and national **networks** were mentioned as a positive platform for discussion and support as well as **signposting** to and from other groups, and receiving **mentoring** or training from others.

For many organisations, active networking included regular **social media** presence as well as one-off events such as award ceremonies. These were said to be **increasing their profile** and visibility within their communities.

Map: Active networking



CP-16: We have a really good relationship with our MP, and sometimes I wonder if having such a good relationship actually is a bit detrimental in terms of your lobbying because it takes a little bit of that edge away you don't nag quite as much and don't bring everything up as much as you should. She's really supportive, she's been to visit us on a number of occasions and she is really supportive when she is here...



Key insights for Voscur's service development

Voscur's work has clear impact and could do more:

- Board development and support strategic/business planning.
- Support smaller organisations to benefit from collaborations.

Voscur's impact is less clear and it could review:

- Support for larger organisations to better meet needs.
- Explore how easy it is for organisations to use our support and streamline processes.



Voscur could do more to mitigate negative external drivers such as:

- Pressure on the health and wellbeing of VCSE staff.
- Influence getting harder to achieve.
- Funding processes being complex and inaccessible.

Voscur could do more to amplify positive external drivers such as:

- The transfer of public assets into community ownership.
- Organisations becoming expert all-rounders and supporting each other in a wider collaborations of community organisations.

