

How to MAKE PRO BONO WORK FOR YOU

Illustration by **Cristobal Schmal**

Chartered surveyors are often approached by professional bodies, charities and other groups to give free expertise and guidance. There are many benefits to volunteering your services, including opportunities to expand your client base and contacts, enhance your CV and give further credibility to your professional standing. Such pro bono work also enables you to come into contact with new people professionally, but outside work. Impress them here and they are more likely to trust you and point business opportunities your way further down the line.

On the downside, though, there are many associations and groups hungry for volunteers and free resources that could rope you into all sorts of activities and support – some of which may not play to your strengths, and could even affect the credibility you are trying to build. So how do you ensure your involvement doesn't bring a disappointing return on investment?

KNOW YOUR MOTIVES

The trick is to be clear from the start what you want to get out of this. It's fine to have personal as well as business motives here, but to ensure you're happy with the long-term outcome, you need to establish what they are. Before

volunteering your expertise to a particular association or group, consider the help you can offer – what will play to your skills and experience? What will you enjoy doing?

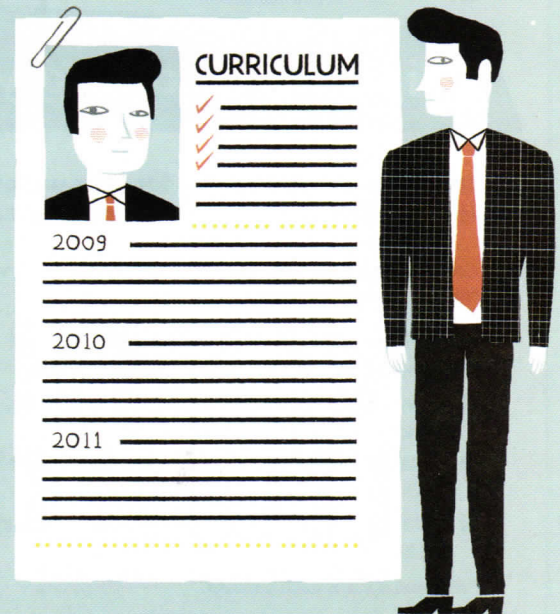
One surveyor we spoke to recommends mapping out how much time you can afford to invest, given your

current priorities. He also clarifies in his own mind the nature of the support he wants to be seen to be contributing before committing to a specific group. Consider, too, who it's best to approach in the organisation, to ensure you give support in a way that's most effective.

If you're not completely clear in your mind what shape you want your involvement to take, you'll be more at risk of being sucked into time-consuming or unfulfilling commitments. You should be in control of your voluntary work, not the other way around.

To help you consider what you want to get out of your voluntary work, see which of these common reasons applies to you:

- I want to expand my network of contacts in this sector
- The group will keep me up to date with the latest developments in this sector/area of interest



- Involvement in the group will help me win clients from this sector by being seen to be an expert
- I want to win business from this group
- I am looking for a new job and this will help make me attractive to a prospective employer
- I support the values of this group and want to help.

Depending on your answers you can then look for groups or associations that offer the best fit. You may know of these already, or you may need to do some research. This could involve seeing which groups or associations represent the interests of people in certain industries or business areas, or why not ask your contacts for their thoughts on groups that best tie in with your interests?

PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

Ideally, you want to give help that plays to your strengths, so be clear about what those are. Think about your professional image and the impression you want to give. If you sense any weaknesses in your networking and rapport-building skills, or your professional and personal profile, it's sensible to sort these out with coaching or training before you get involved.

Finally, don't forget to keep yourself in the driving seat and try not to get diverted too much in supporting the group you choose. Keep those original goals and ambitions in focus. Help others achieve their plans – but make sure yours are not sacrificed in the process.

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FOR WAYS to get involved in pro bono work through RICS, turn to p49

CONSIDER THE HELP YOU CAN OFFER – WHAT WILL PLAY TO YOUR SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE? WHAT WILL YOU ENJOY DOING?