APM
Association for Project Management

Finding and Incorporating Social Value into Projects

Introduction

**"The pace of change has never been this fast, yet it will never be this slow again."
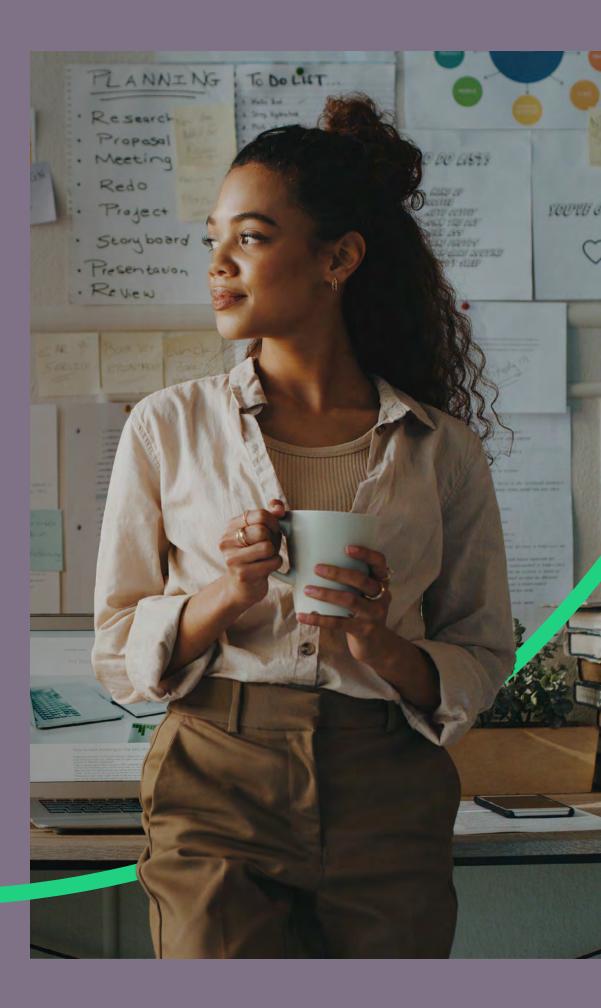- Justin Trudeau**

When APM was planning its most recent annual conference, the subject of change was high on the agenda; not just because change is constant, but because the world is now experiencing different types of change – ones that are occurring faster and more frequently, with wider-reaching impacts than ever before. This changing and challenging world places a greater emphasis on projects to take account of the needs of individuals, communities and society as a whole.

There have always been projects that are intended solely to deliver a societal benefit. But we are seeing a growing desire among project professionals and business leaders to incorporate social value into all projects; that is, a means of helping people live a longer life, a more fulfilling life, improve their living standards, improve their well-being, enhance social equality or reduce geographic inequality.

What emerged from our annual conference was that there is still uncertainty around how this can be done, around areas such as how social value is defined and subsequently measured. There are also challenges associated with 'selling' longer-term social benefits to key stakeholders and gaining appropriate buy-in. This document answers some of the most frequently asked questions in this area by providing practical advice from APM's Change Changes conference, to embed social benefit from the start and ensure goals are met. Because when projects succeed, society benefits.

Future Lives and Landscapes

This document has been produced as part of APM's Future Lives and Landscapes campaign, which is helping the project profession overcome challenges and seize opportunities to meet society's needs. The campaign will bring research, thought leadership and expert opinion to project practitioners, employers, business leaders and others.

Visit apm.org.uk/campaign/future-lives-and-landscapes to learn more about how this campaign is improving the delivery of projects for the benefit of society, now and in the future.

Q: How can we incorporate social value or benefit into our projects?

A: Make it a core part of your project plan from the outset

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When it comes to delivery of social values, the shift must be away from delivering a project and then, afterwards, saying 'how can we add a bit of social value?' It must not be a bolt on. It needs to be a core part of what projects are.

Professor Adam Boddison OBE, Chief Executive, APM

Q: How can project professionals overcome resistance to incorporating social value into their project and bring people with them on the journey?

A: Articulate your vision in a way that inspires people

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We are the leaders of our profession. If we can't articulate the need to include social value in a way that inspires others, what's the point?

Alistair Godbold, Director, The Nichols Group

Q: **How do we define the outcomes and measure whether we've delivered value?**

A: **Create a partnership approach for stakeholder engagement**

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We hear a lot about stakeholder management, but if I'm a stakeholder, do I really want to be managed? The key for me is much more about stakeholder partnership.

Andrew Morgan, Head of Project Delivery Profession, HM Revenue & Customs

A: **Have conversations with the right people to identify things that are mutually beneficial and agree what success looks like**

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Thinking about a particular conservation project I'm sponsoring at the moment, it's about being really clear about what elements of the project we want to collaborate with people on. How will we use the future building that will exist, and how will the local community benefit? That's absolutely something we want to work with people on.

Be honest about how you'll build that into timescales, because that's often not something that can be done quickly.

Mike Hudson, Head of Strategic Planning and Project/Programme Management, The National Trust

A: **Consider who you're not engaging with and whether it would be beneficial to bring them into these conversations**

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With the tools that are available now for network analysis, you can see who you're not engaging with who you perhaps should be. If you have someone in one department looking at data about outcomes, you can connect them with another department that's looking at other data and say 'did you know so and so is working on this?'

Gillian Magee, Head of Programme Delivery Enabling Units IT, AstraZeneca

Q: What advice would you give for projects where we know success will be difficult to measure but we also know it's the right thing to do?

A: Complete business cases quickly

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It's about organisational agility. We can sometimes spend 6-12 months building a business case for something and, ultimately, the outcome of that project is needed now. You need the right people in the room and you need to take a risk.

Gillian Magee

A: Consider lessons that can be learned from past projects

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Sometimes it's about looking back at a project in hindsight. The one that always stands out to me is the Sydney Opera House, which was years late and over budget. But no one in the world would doubt the value of that building.

Andrew Morgan

A: Where possible, work on projects that will deliver a social benefit you care about personally

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I would encourage people to think about what social value you want to support. It's always easier to deliver a project if it's something you're passionate about.

Gillian Magee

Q: What skills will help with this?

A: Human-centred skills (also known as 'soft skills' or 'power skills') will be the most helpful for incorporating social value into projects

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If technology takes over more of the technical side of things and a lot of that gets automated, there is a need to focus on the power skills.

Across the globe there are four skills that come up regularly:
• Effective communication – how do we understand each other; how do we listen; how do we understand different cultures?
• Problem-solving – educate people on 'what is my end problem to solve?'
• Collaborative leadership – bring people together and allow collaboration. Break the silos away and bring everybody's ideas to the table.
• Strategic thinking – understand the holistic environment in which a project operates. People aren't born with that skill. They need to think about the strategy they're supporting with their project.

Lysan Drabon, Managing Director, Europe, Project Management Institute

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Skills I would suggest people focus on are:
• Understanding the stakeholders that are involved.
• Humility – knowing we don't have all the answers.
• Resilience.

These are not really technical competences, but important nonetheless.

Mike Hudson

Q: How can the profession attract and retain the right people to deliver projects that create social value?

A: Shout about successes to attract new talent

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There are people who want to change career and those people who are managing projects in an accidental manner. What about people who have taken a break? How can we make them aware of project management carers, or help them back into the profession?

We want to focus on bringing new people to the profession by showing that large scale projects impact people and impact society.

Lysan Drabon

A: Encourage knowledge-sharing when people move to new roles, to ensure expertise is transferred and not lost

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We used to see quite a vertical route through a membership body but we no longer see that. There's a lot of horizontal movement as people change jobs and change careers. The risk is that we [the project profession] end up losing people.

The opportunity is…people who do move into other roles will retain the knowledge they gain and share it with others.

Adam Boddison

Share your views

We want to hear from project, programme and portfolio professionals on the themes explored in this document.

How do you think more project practitioners can find a way to add social value to their projects? Do you feel there is a clear and common understanding of what constitutes social value, or how to tell whether the intended benefits have been realised? Or do you have a noteworthy example of a well-managed project that has successfully incorporated and delivered social value?

If you'd like to get in touch, contact communications@apm.org.uk

Further reading and additional resources

APM Competence Framework – Our Competence Framework consists of 29 competences based around outcomes that project professionals need to achieve, and includes a rating scale for assessing performance. Competences linked to social value in projects include sustainability, business case, benefits management, stakeholder engagement and more.

APM Podcast – Our podcast series discusses the latest project management topics. New episodes are available free on Anchor, Spotify, Apple and Google podcasts.

APM Learning (exclusive to fee-paying members of APM) – This online resource provides our members with access to a wide range of interactive digital learning content that's quality assured and approved by APM.

APM Community (exclusive to Individual members of APM) – If you want to ask further questions or share your thoughts on social value in projects, our online community allows our members to connect and start discussions with project professionals around the world.

We are the only chartered membership organisation for the project profession