

Why social value is a must-have, not a nice-to-have.

Once largely viewed as the ‘fluffy stuff’ in bids, today social value is a significant and serious part of every government contract. In fact, says social value adviser Richard Dennis OBE, a former COO of Amey’s FM division, it’s fast becoming a significant and serious part of doing business full-stop.

Pick a number between 10 and 30 – that’s the percentage of marks allotted to social value in the latest round of government-awarded contracts. But even if you’re not chasing large public sector work, demonstrating the wider impact you have on society is only becoming more important to employees, customers, shareholders and, ultimately, your bottom line.

“Paying serious attention to social value won’t guarantee that you win work or attract talent, but ignoring it will certainly help you lose it,” says Richard. “What used to be a nice-to-have is now a must-have.”



Richard Dennis OBE

Over the last year or so, contracts for the UK ministries of health, justice and defence have seen social value weightings of up to 30%. Meanwhile, more broadly, 77% of consumers say they’re more likely to use companies committed to making the world a better place. As for investors, 73% state efforts to improve the environment and society play into their decision-making.¹

It’s also becoming a key differentiator when it comes to recruitment. According to LinkedIn, 59% of professionals in Europe say they wouldn’t work for a company that doesn’t share their values.²

Demonstrating impact

A soldier for three decades, Richard left the Army to launch his own consultancy, helping organisations navigate change. He is now an established social value adviser to the government’s strategic supply chain and helped facilities management giants Amey secure a major Defence accommodation contract with an estimated TCV of over £200m with a perfect social value score.

What set Amey’s bid apart from the competition was a genuine and enduring commitment to improving the lived experience for military families. With Richard’s help, Amey set up community groups in military garrisons where residents can have their say on the way their homes are serviced. He has also helped them to develop a social value scheme across many of the 62 prisons they maintain, providing inmates with the opportunity to work alongside the company’s staff to learn decorating skills, earn qualifications and secure jobs.

Where are you on your social value journey?

There are many ways that a company can demonstrate social value, whether it’s through employment opportunities for disadvantaged communities, commitments to diversity and the environment, or supporting charitable organisations.

But although many companies have long been passionate about being a force for wider good, many still haven't got to grips with social value or misguidedly believe they're good enough.

Richard says that whatever stage you think you're at, it's always beneficial to check. "Take advice, do your research and get a clear, honest picture. We start with a benchmarking exercise. We look at a business's vision, purpose and values and how well they're embedded; how a company is measuring what they're doing against ISO standards or the UN Sustainability Goals; their commitment to fair and equitable employment and procurement; environmental commitments; and employee schemes, such as wellbeing programmes and community volunteering.

"Your social value journey should always start with being utterly clear about your purpose. I ask leaders to imagine their business's obituary. How would they want the business to be remembered in, say, 25 years' time? Once you have your purpose, what are the values you need to underpin it? That will help you to create your narrative and inform your social value agenda. This then needs to be baked into your operations – not just something that falls under HR or HSEQ – in order to be lived and authentic."

Bringing your bid to life

It's one thing to be delivering social value, but it's another to evidence it if you're going after those big government contracts. "Tenders can be notoriously opaque, so make sure you're clear on what you're being asked and then ask yourself how you'll evidence it. Why should assessors believe you?"

"It's really important that you're not scrabbling around looking for evidence when you're in the thick of bid writing. So, when you're not in a work-winning cycle, make sure your social value activities are relevant, measurable and captured in a central library. Because these are the stories you can call on to bring your bid to life. You also need to show how you'll increase your commitment over the life of the contract, not just in the first few weeks.

"Social value is here to stay and is only going to get more important. Not only is it a moral imperative for an organisation, it's also a commercial one. With it you'll win work, you'll attract the best talent, your customers and shareholders will buy into your purpose and you'll be seen as a company that people want to do business with."

Richard Dennis OBE is a senior strategic operator and executive coach with extensive leadership and management experience in the defence, critical national infrastructure and FM sectors. He specialises in supporting senior leaders and their teams to recognise and adjust to changing environments and lead transformational change.

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1. <https://impactreporting.co.uk/social-value-stats/>

2. Company Values Matter More than Ever—And It's Reinventing the Job Search; Catherine Fisher, LinkedIn Career Expert; April 19, 2023