

# Social value: a briefing for community rail partnerships and station groups



*A day of action at Sleaford Station*

**This paper introduces social value, outlining what the concept means for community rail partnerships and groups, and how it can be applied to the increasingly diverse range of activities they undertake.**

It also highlights ongoing work within the rail industry on social value, including the new Rail Social Value Tool, which is set to be launched in Spring 2022.

## Overview of social value

An organisation can be seen to add social value when it makes a positive contribution to the long-term wellbeing and resilience of individuals, communities, and society in general.

Social Value UK define social value as the value that people experience through changes in their lives. Their **Principles of Social Value** says that an account of social value is a story about the changes experienced by people – this can include qualitative, quantitative, and comparative information.

The term social value has become more widely used since government introduced the Public Services (Social Value) Act in 2012. This requires public bodies to have regard to wider economic, social, and environmental wellbeing when entering into service contracts, and thus to consider communities' needs in the design of services. The government's **Social Value Model** sets out a framework of what this looks like, and recognises community engagement and co-creation, as well as reducing social inequalities and supporting recovery from the pandemic, as being important.

## What does this mean for community rail?

Thinking about social value can help groups and organisations – including those in community rail – to be effective, increase their impact, and shout about the great work they are doing and the difference they are making in their local communities. Community rail partnerships and groups may also be asked about the social value they bring by funders or by other partners in the industry, and it may help to bring in funding from new sources too.

Most community rail partnerships and station groups are relatively small and are rarely delivering paid for services. They may feel that all of what they do offers social value. Indeed, the way the Community Rail Network describes and promotes community rail puts societal benefits at the forefront: we often talk about community rail as helping communities get as much benefit as possible from local railways and stations. This inherent focus on social impact tends to be different to train operators and other rail industry partners who are looking at the *additional* social value they create while undertaking their day-to-day business.

Questions for community rail partnerships and groups to ask themselves when thinking about social value:

- Why are you doing this work? (and keep asking why until you get to your ultimate goals)
- How do you know that your work is delivering positive social impact?

**Activities** - what takes place, e.g. a community rail partnership runs a 'Try the Train' trip

**Outputs** - direct products from the activity, e.g. 30 school pupils take part in the trip

**Outcomes** - the change that occurs as a result of the activity, e.g. some pupils experience train travel for the first time, other pupils become more confident and familiar with rail travel

**Impacts** - potential longer-term effects, e.g. change in travel behaviour, more journeys made by rail



Volunteers at work at Duffield Station

Here are some things that you might do:

**Identify needs** within your community and think about how your work is meeting that need and making a difference.

**Map outputs and outcomes** for potential projects and identify the indicators that will help you know if you are achieving them. Look at past projects to see if they resulted in any unexpected outcomes.

**Ask community members, participants, volunteers, and partners** what they experience and value as a result of your activities, e.g. new friendships with other volunteers, healthy exercise, a safer/nicer station, increased biodiversity, connecting with nature, a welcoming atmosphere, increased skills, a sense of pride in the local area, improved confidence to use the train, new work/education/social opportunities. Map what you do against what is important to local people and communities.

**Collect feedback, quotes, and case studies** that illustrate the changes your project or work has made to people’s lives.

**Monitor improvements and changes** from a baseline at the start of projects. Think about what you can record that demonstrates your project is meeting the outcomes you hoped it would. Do you have ways to capture unexpected outcomes?

By using such methods to identify where activities have demonstrable impact, community rail partnerships and groups can make informed decisions as to where to focus their time, energy, and resources to maximise results.

Find out more about outcomes and impact, including examples, in our publications:

**Station adoption and community projects: using an outcomes-based approach**

**The Value of Community Rail**



*Installing planters in Lancing Station garden*

## Impact tool

Community Rail Network has worked with a social enterprise called Impact Reporting to develop a tool to enable its members (community rail partnerships and station groups) to track and record their activities and associated indicators of change. This helps them to demonstrate their outcomes and impact, including easily produced reports, to use how you wish.

The platform is user-friendly and suitable for small groups who want to build a picture of the work they do, as well as larger partnerships running multiple projects and strands of work. The tool can be tailored to your needs and also has a function to enable you to conduct polls and surveys to support your work. As of February 2022, we have 45 community rail partnerships and station groups signed up to Impact, exploring how its functions can benefit their work, with more expressing an interest in using the tool.

For more information and sign-up details (which is completely free for Community Rail Network members), contact [impact@communityrail.org.uk](mailto:impact@communityrail.org.uk).

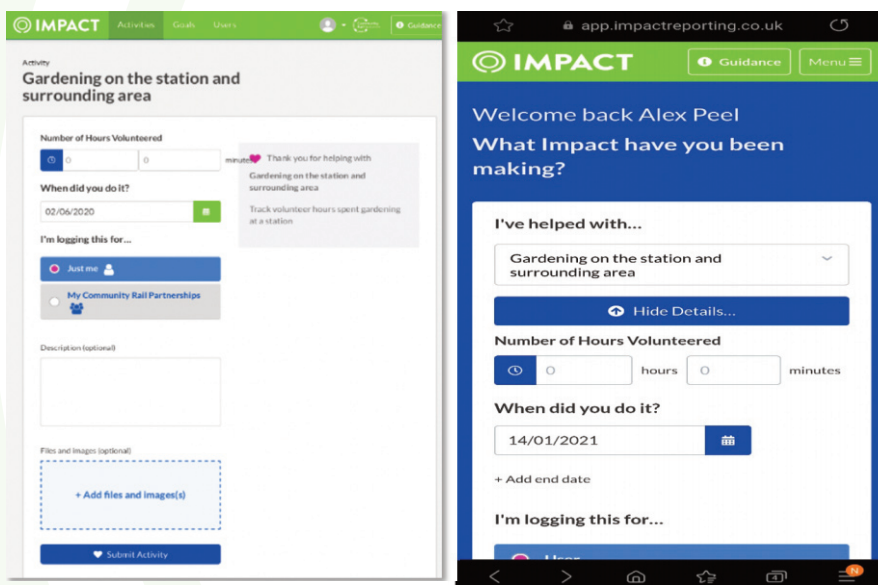
## Calculating social value

There are various ways to calculate social value, such as Social Return on Investment (SROI), or other methods using recognised values and formulae. A common example for community rail partnerships and groups is to use an hourly rate equivalent for volunteer time to demonstrate the amount of volunteering resource given to community projects.

The steps outlined above are always the first ones to take. Larger organisations may want, or be asked, to demonstrate other forms of social value such as using calculations. Community Rail Network is interested to know when members wish to do this, so we can advise, including on whether our Impact tool, or the Rail Social Value Tool (see below) can help. This will also help us to develop further support and guidance for members as appropriate and to share examples across the network.

It is important to remember that demonstrating social value is not always about a monetary value or quantitative data. Working through the steps above are just as important to demonstrate how

your work brings value to people's lives. If funders and partners ask you to provide evidence of the social value delivered by your partnership, group, or any particular project, it is just as valid and appropriate for you to provide case studies, quotes and testimonies showing the positive effect on people's lives as any numerical data, although often a combination is most effective. For example, providing data on the number of people you're engaging, plus a selection of testimonies, images and case studies that tell the story of the effects you're having, can make a strong evidence base.





A heritage exhibition at St Albans City

## Rail industry work on social value

Due to the inherently subjective nature of social value, there is no one standardised approach to measure it. However, organisations across various sectors, including rail, are working towards more consistent frameworks to assess social value on a wider, more commonly recognised scale.

The Rail Social Value Tool (RSVT) is an online tool developed specifically for the GB rail industry. This enables the industry to forecast, monitor, and evaluate the social value of its projects and day-to-day operations, and guide investment decisions.

RSVT is provided by RSSB and Loop (formerly known as SPC) and co-funded by Network Rail. The tool was developed as part of a progressive evolution of the Common Social Impact Framework for Rail. The RSVT will enable the social value of projects and activities to be captured through monetised and non-monetised indicators across a range of social impacts. You can read [more about the RSVT](#) and the [approach to social value](#) on the RSSB website.

There will be an industry-wide launch of the tool in Spring 2022. Community Rail Network is following the progress of the tool to identify and advise on how community rail might engage with it. As use of the tool develops within the industry, Community Rail Network will support members to negotiate how they might work with railway partners to get the most out of this resource.

## Further support on social value from Community Rail Network

Over the past few years, we have run several courses and sessions to help our members plan and evidence their projects, and we are supporting increasing numbers to start using our Impact tool.

We will continue this work in 2022-23, including offering support on social value as the rail industry steps up its focus. [Sign up](#) to Community Rail News for the latest details, or contact [impact@communityrail.org.uk](mailto:impact@communityrail.org.uk).



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