



YPSV
YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN
SOCIAL VALUE

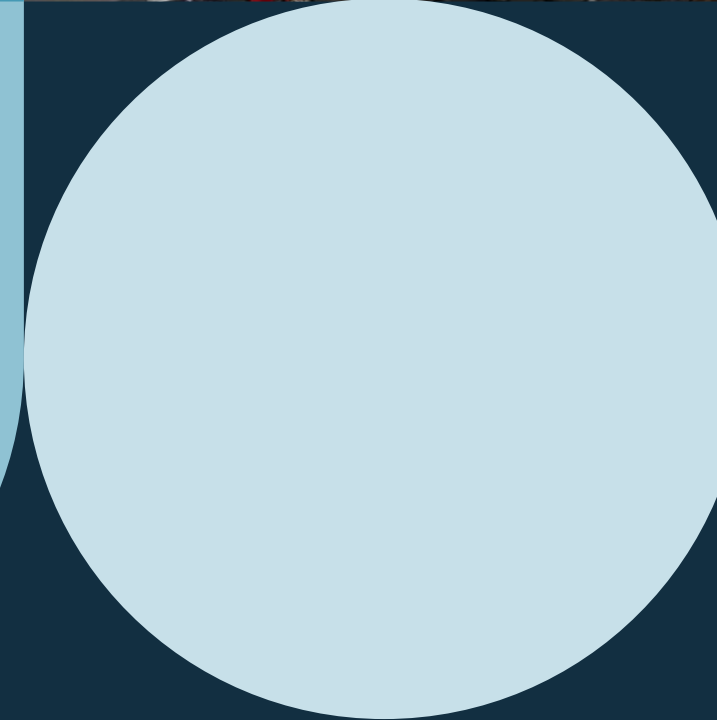
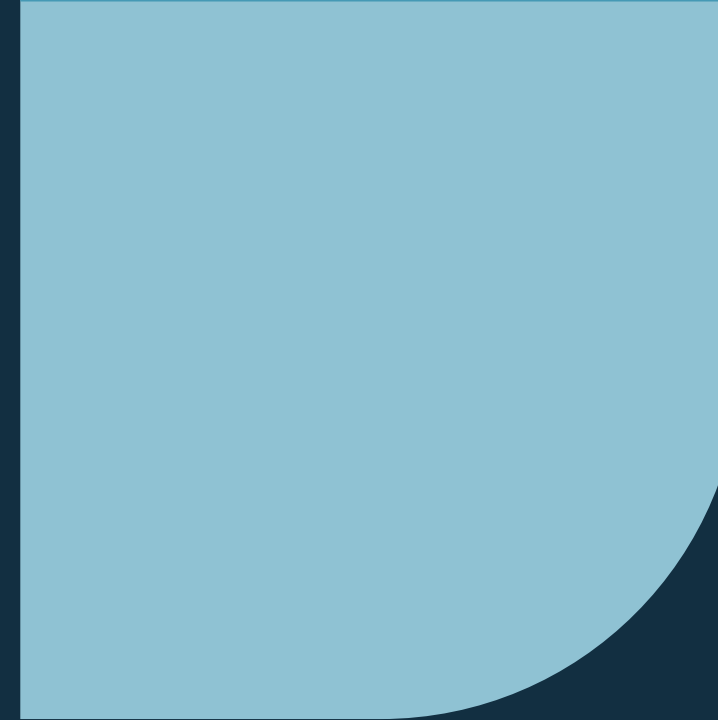
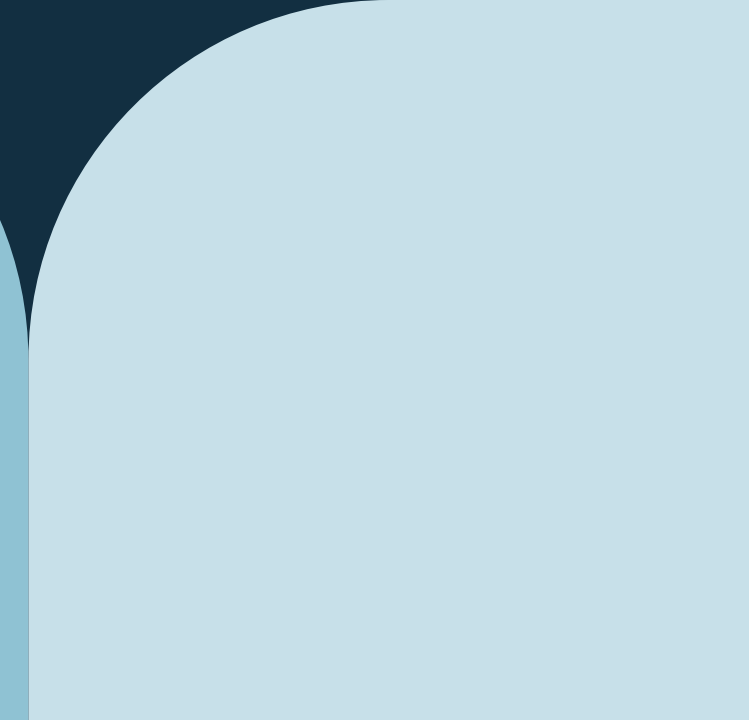
AECOM DELIVERING
A BETTER
WORLD.

Designed by

nb_d

Shaping Careers in Social Value

*Young Professionals in Social Value
in collaboration with AECOM*



Purpose

Social Value has experienced rapid growth as a professional and technical discipline. Roles vary hugely between organisations, with different expectations, job titles, and responsibilities. There is no single recognised career pathway or professional framework.

In January 2026, a group of young and experienced professionals came together to start addressing this issue: the Shaping Careers in Social Value Hackathon.



January 2026: An interactive "hackathon" session brought together a range of young and experienced professionals to co-create the outputs of this report.

Key Takeaways

01

There is a desire for clear career pathways, especially from young professionals entering the sector. We need increased visibility of the steps, skills, and experiences needed at each career stage.

02

We are losing talent due to this lack of structure. Despite wanting to work in the sector, young people consider a career in social value higher risk than more established disciplines, where future pathways are well known and therefore “safer”.

03

Careers in social value must be flexible. Many social value careers will involve horizontal career moves, with experienced professionals shifting between the “*families*” of Consultancy, Corporate/ESG, Delivery, Procurement/Policy and Research & Measurement.

04

Seven key components of a social value career were identified. Communication, Stakeholder Engagement & Management, Delivery, Impact measurement & Reporting, Work Winning, Strategy, and Influencing Policy.

05

Purpose-driven work brings a wide mix of emotions, reflecting both the challenges involved and the impact being achieved. Working in social value can create confusion and frustration, but also pride, resilience and excitement. We should celebrate our wins and recognise the wealth of emerging and existing talent.

Exploring social value career “families”

Social value roles can look very different on paper. Job titles, responsibilities and organisational contexts vary widely, and there is no single blueprint for a social value career.

To better understand these differences, we explored a set of distinct “social value families”, grouping roles by the type of work they focus on rather than by seniority. While these families help describe the breadth of roles across the sector, our findings showed that the challenges, highlights and emotions experienced at each career stage were strikingly consistent. The rest of this document, therefore, looks at social value careers in general, recognising that while roles may differ, the lived experience of progression is often shared.



Consultancy

Advising clients on social value strategy, planning, delivery and reporting across projects and organisations.



Corporate/ESG

Embedding social value into organisational strategy, ESG commitments, governance and business operations.



Delivery

Designing and delivering on the ground social value activity with communities, partners and delivery teams.



Procurement/Policy

Shaping social value through procurement processes, policy development and contracts.



Research & Measurement

Collecting, analysing and quantifying data to evidence social value outcomes and impact.

Social Value Career




The workshops identified seven core components of a social value professional's role. Whilst these may not be exhaustive, they will evolve, with the level of utilisation shifting as professionals move through different stages of their careers.



Pre Career	Foundational	Proficient	Advanced	Expert	Leader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding the right path or route to match your career choices with your passion and values. You might be involved in organising events, or engaging with community, charitable or education organisations. Or you might be undertaking related academic courses. Often a Humanities or social science degree. Work experience and mentoring will provide direction on career choice and access to entry level roles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are likely to spend your time delivering organisational or project-related activity, tracking progress and impact. You may start to gain experience developing social value responses, feeding into work winning activities and social value planning. Exploring the different specialisms and families will be important to understand what path you would like to take. Developing good relationships with colleagues and partner organisations will be a critical to your success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery is probably the largest part of your role. You will likely be responsible for organisational or project-related activity, tracking progress and the impact. You might be involved in work winning activity, developing solutions and responding to social value questions in public procurement/funding. You may consider professional accreditation, post-graduate learning and targeted upskilling. Building strong relationships with your colleagues and peers is critical at this stage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional relationships will grow beyond individual projects and organisations, as you influence functions, regions and sectors. You might have experience developing a high-scoring social value bid response, measuring social value, inputting into strategy, and conversations at a client and policy level. Communication, multi-tasking and problem-solving skills will be essential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You might oversee a team of social value professionals or be an organisational lead, providing quality assurance as a subject matter expert. You may be responsible for work winning activity, feeding into and responding to social value questions in public procurement. Social value delivery and measurement activity will be much reduced, likely overseeing other's activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Much of your role is likely to influence and engage as a trusted voice. This includes internal and external stakeholders, policy makers and clients, and developing social value strategy. You might review and sign off work winning activity, providing client and industry insights. It is likely that less than a quarter of your role will involve social value delivery and measurement, limited to high-profile or strategic initiatives. Your strong specialist knowledge will be balanced with broader collaborative, innovative skills across disciplines.

The human side of career development

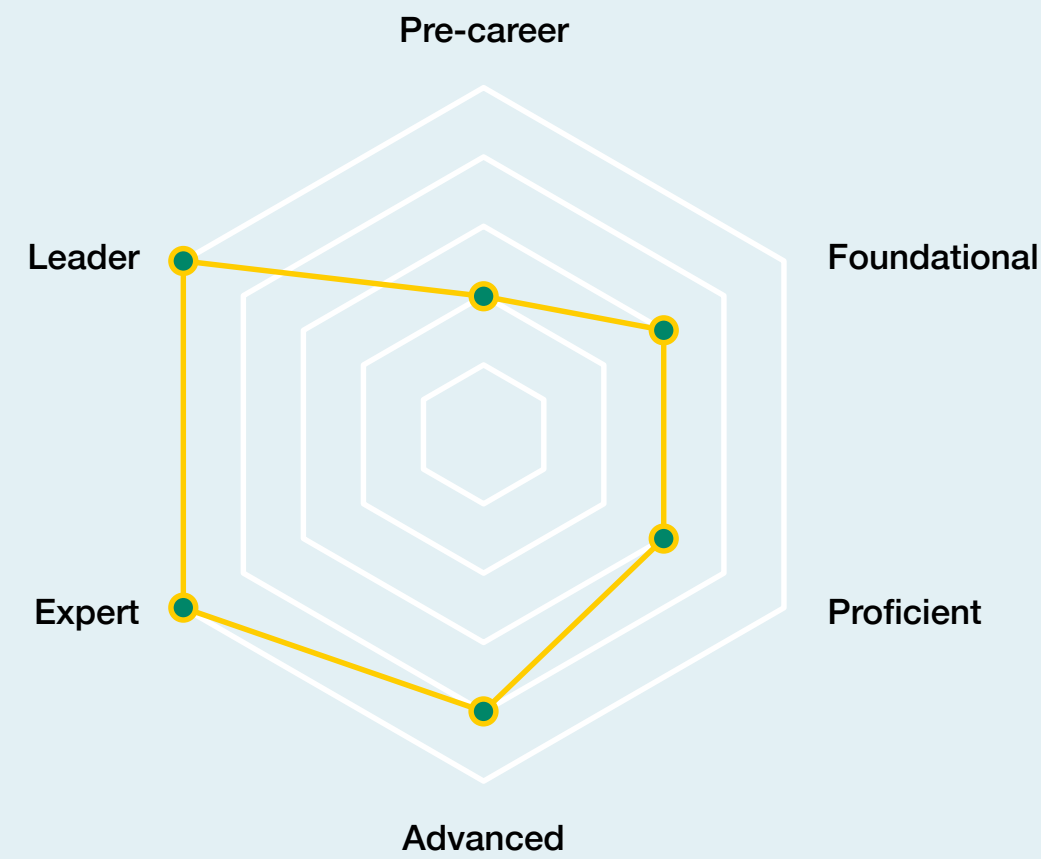
In addition to understanding how people spend their time at various career stages, the audience explored what it was like to work at each stage. What were the expectations, experiences and emotions at each career stage.

	Pre-career	Foundational	Proficient	Advanced	Expert	Leader
Positives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility and openness to learning Strong values and motivation Creativity, passion and fresh perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure to teams, clients and activity Often hands-on learning Growing confidence from seeing early impact of social value delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased ownership and responsibility Clearer professional identity and often more motivated Understanding how impactful change can happen — quality over quantity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading initiatives, working groups, frameworks and projects Greater autonomy and credibility Broader and bolder influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building a team and feeling less alone Bigger network of professionals to lean on and collaborate with Driving impactful change within organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shaping policy and systems Mentoring future professionals Seeing the long-term impact of your work
Challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not sure where to start / finding mentorship Difficulty finding paid entry roles Not a visible career 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not understood by colleagues / justifying need Budget / cost pressures Managing expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influencing internally Frustration at slow pace of change Balancing quality vs quantity of delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driving behavioural change Delegating delivery and responsibilities Balancing strategy and delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsibility for people, culture and outcomes Decision-making Isolation at senior levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling unheard Conflicting ethics Lack of support / direction from senior leaders
Emotions Felt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong values and motivation Creativity, passion and fresh perspectives Lost, unsure or confused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivated More confident but still uncertain Occasionally stretched or overwhelmed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pride, satisfaction and growing confidence Imposter syndrome Frustration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confident, resilient and comfortable with challenge Reflective and proud Sometimes overwhelmed due to responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fulfilled and proud Responsible and reflective Stagnant and frustrated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excited about change and possibilities Confident and authoritative Tired and stretched

A deeper dive into the components of a Social Value career

We will now take a further look at each of the seven core components identified by the workshop, and how the balance of your time is spent on each one. Whilst some components are a constant feature, many of them will wax and wane as you progress through different career stages and your experience, role and responsibilities change. The purpose of mapping these components is to provide clarity on the expectations of each career stage (*I know what to expect*), direction and focus areas for those looking to progress into their next stage (*what do I need to do*) and to recognise that individuals may prefer a career stage with a particular balance either left, right or the same as their current position (*how do I want to spend my time*).





Communication

Being able to communicate is desired from a pre-career level, and should strengthen over time, often due to experience and exposure to work. It is a core competency from Advanced onwards.

Social value requires engaging communities, understanding local needs and co-creating solutions. Effective communication is vital to:

- Building trust and meaningful relationships with local stakeholders.
- Translate community feedback into actionable social value delivery.
- Influencing colleagues, partners and clients on approaches, resources and upskilling.

As you progress in your career, you often need to influence project managers, procurement teams, supply chain partners and senior leaders, as well as navigate client relationships. This means communicating the why, the how and the importance of social value in a way that is compelling, strategic and aligned to the team's goals is necessary.

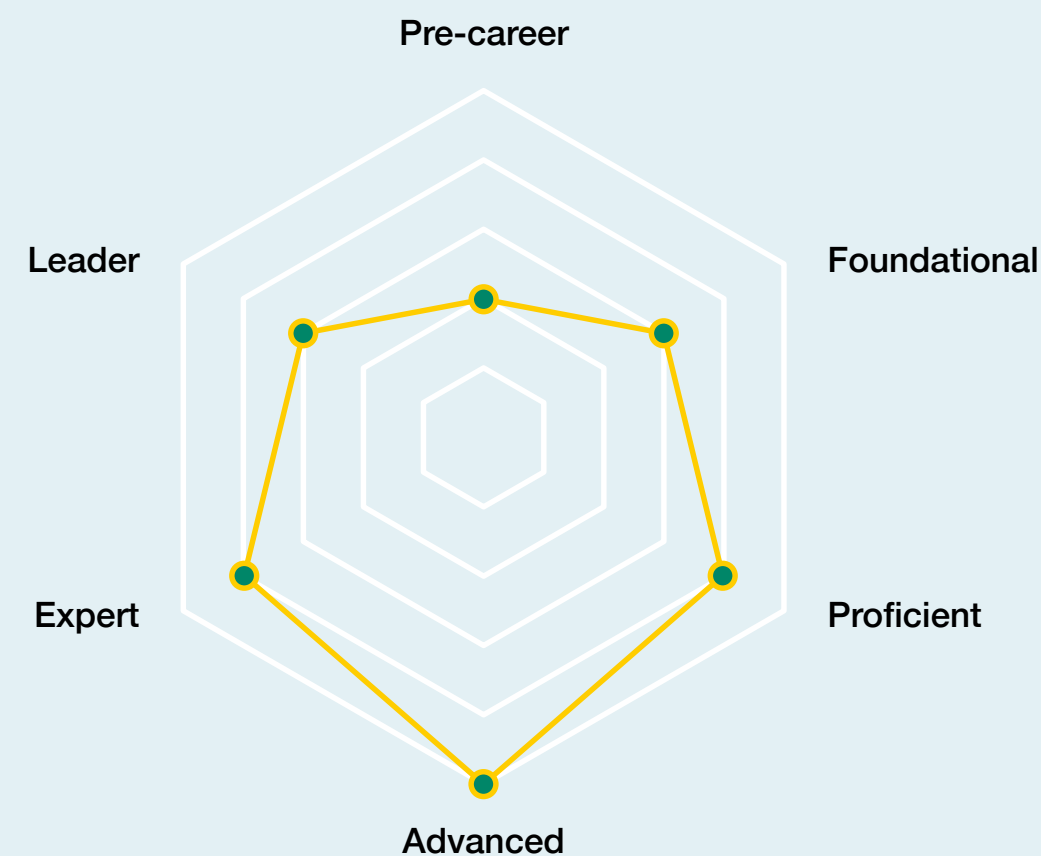
Stakeholder Engagement & Management

Stakeholder Engagement & Management is intrinsically linked to communication, and generally follows the same pattern of continued growth and importance as your influence and reach develop.

This skill develops and changes throughout your career, however it is important to:

- Understand stakeholder needs, priorities and motivations whilst managing complex or conflicting interests.
- Influence decision-makers and align multiple stakeholders with varying social value maturity levels.

At the start of a professional's career, we found stakeholder engagement & management to be more operational, including attending meetings and events, supporting communications and building rapport with communities and clients. As professionals progress into their career, this skill develops into being responsible for the engagement, anticipating risks, resolving conflicts, and engaging with higher profile organisations and senior leaders.



Delivery

On the ground delivery is a skill professionals typically develop early in their careers and peak during Advanced. As professionals progress into more senior roles, responsibilities shift toward delegation, oversight, and team leadership.

This set of skills focuses on the practical implementation of turning commitments and strategies into real measurable outcomes by:

- Planning, scheduling and coordinating activities, including troubleshooting and adapting to challenges in delivery.
- Managing delivery partners and teams to ensure they know their responsibilities.
- Maintaining momentum and innovative ideas across long-term contracts and programmes.

The first four stages of our career categories are often heavily involved in delivery. However, this reduces as senior professionals become less involved in day to day technical delivery and instead rely on their team to execute activities while they focus on strategic direction, quality assurance, and enabling others to deliver.

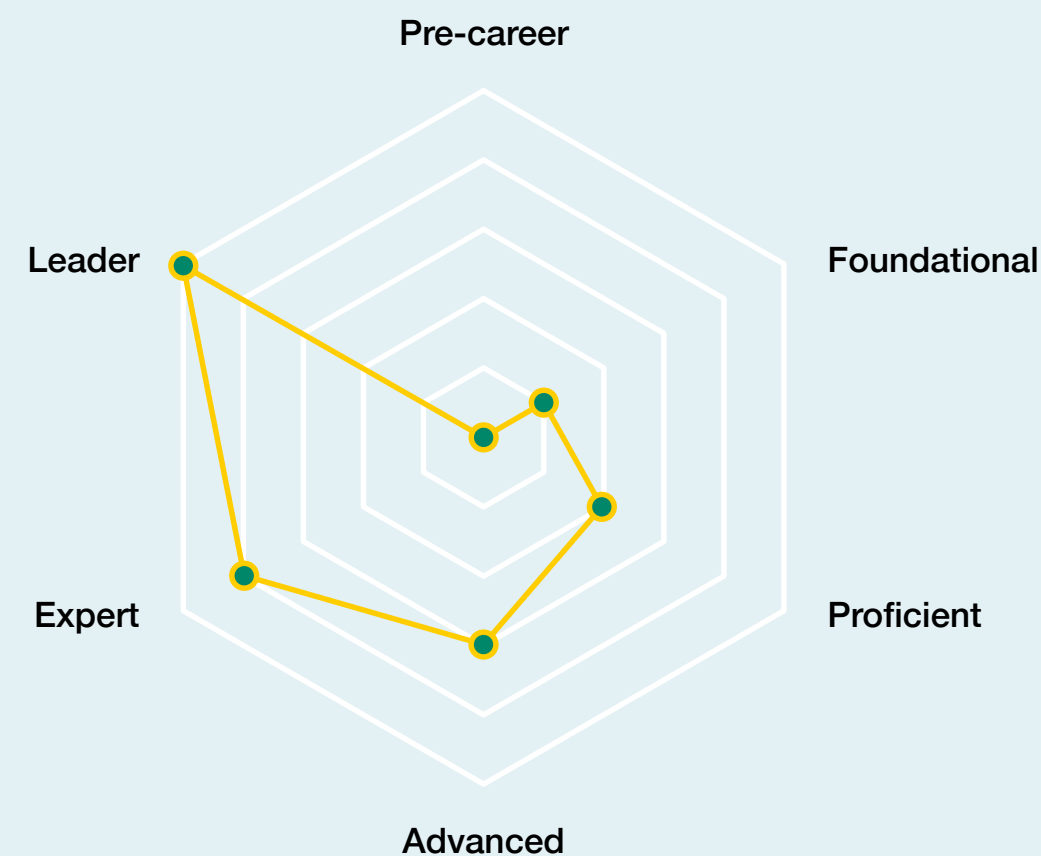
Impact Measurement & Reporting

As you grow your delivery experience, the tracking, measurement and reporting of that activity becomes increasingly important. Peaking from proficient to advanced, as professionals progress into senior roles, responsibilities shift toward oversight, technical review and approvals, and team leadership.

The ability to effectively collect, interpret and use social value impact can be critical to other roles components, including your ability to communicate, influence people and develop strategy. As you progress, you will gain experience of varying measurement approaches across delivery teams, suppliers, clients and the evidence requirements of different contracts. This will include:

- Collecting accurate data and evidence against contractual KPIs, including the use of social value reporting platforms and measurement frameworks.
- Understanding different measurement approaches, their applicability and uses against desired measurement objectives, purpose and audience.

As responsibilities evolve, professionals shift from hands on data collection to overseeing reporting frameworks, quality assurance and team delivery. At this level, the focus moves to ensuring accuracy, consistency and strategic alignment across multiple projects, rather than producing the reports themselves.



Work Winning

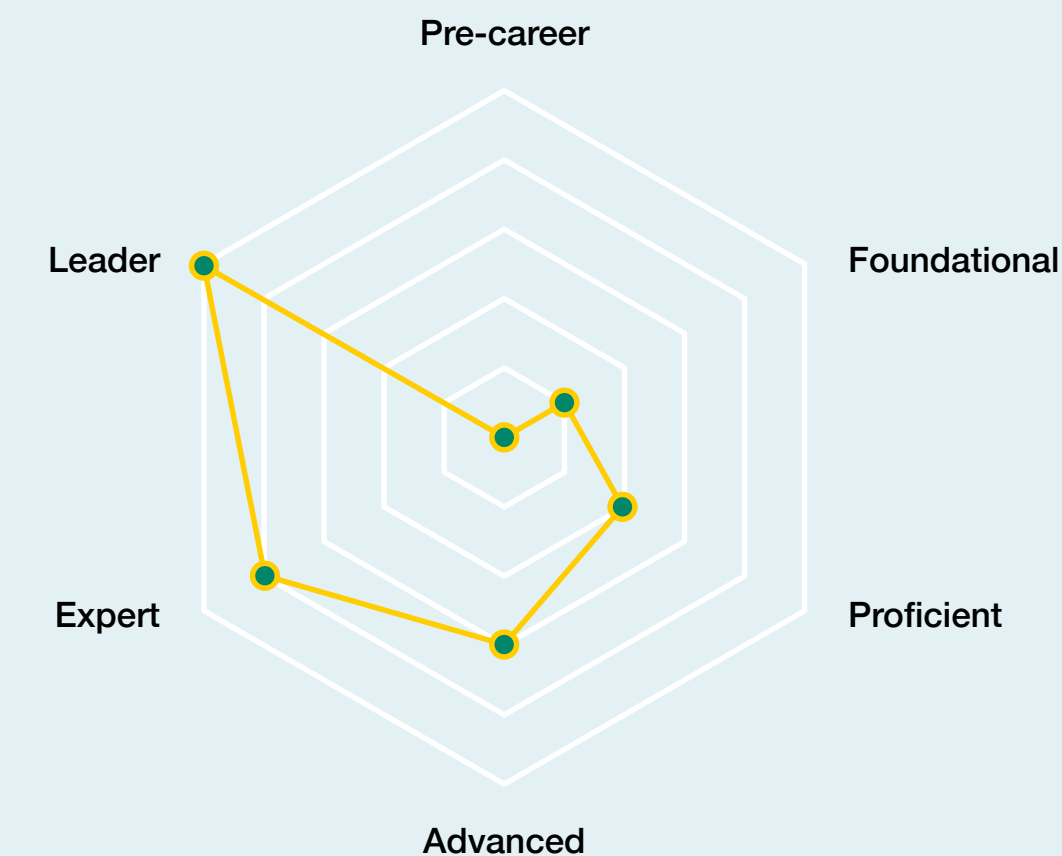
Social value has become a key differentiator for organisations tendering for contracts, and so being able to develop compelling social value solutions and responses has become a desirable skill. This has meant that a growing part of a Social Value professional's role will be spent on work-winning activity.

Understanding how to structure, review, and quality assure social value bid responses develops over time, as professionals gain experience across projects, procurement routes and client expectations. Confidence in this skill typically grows from mid career onwards as you are able to:

- Understand client priorities and legislative procurement approaches.

- Write clear and compelling responses aligned to the procurement frameworks and evaluation criteria.
- Develop strategic narratives with project teams that will deliver impact beyond compliance, with clear processes for delivery through contract management.

As responsibilities grow, professionals increasingly shift from writing the content themselves to overseeing the process, guiding the team, and setting the strategic direction of the response. At this level, the focus is on quality assurance, narrative consistency, and ensuring the submission reflects organisational capability and client priorities.



Strategy

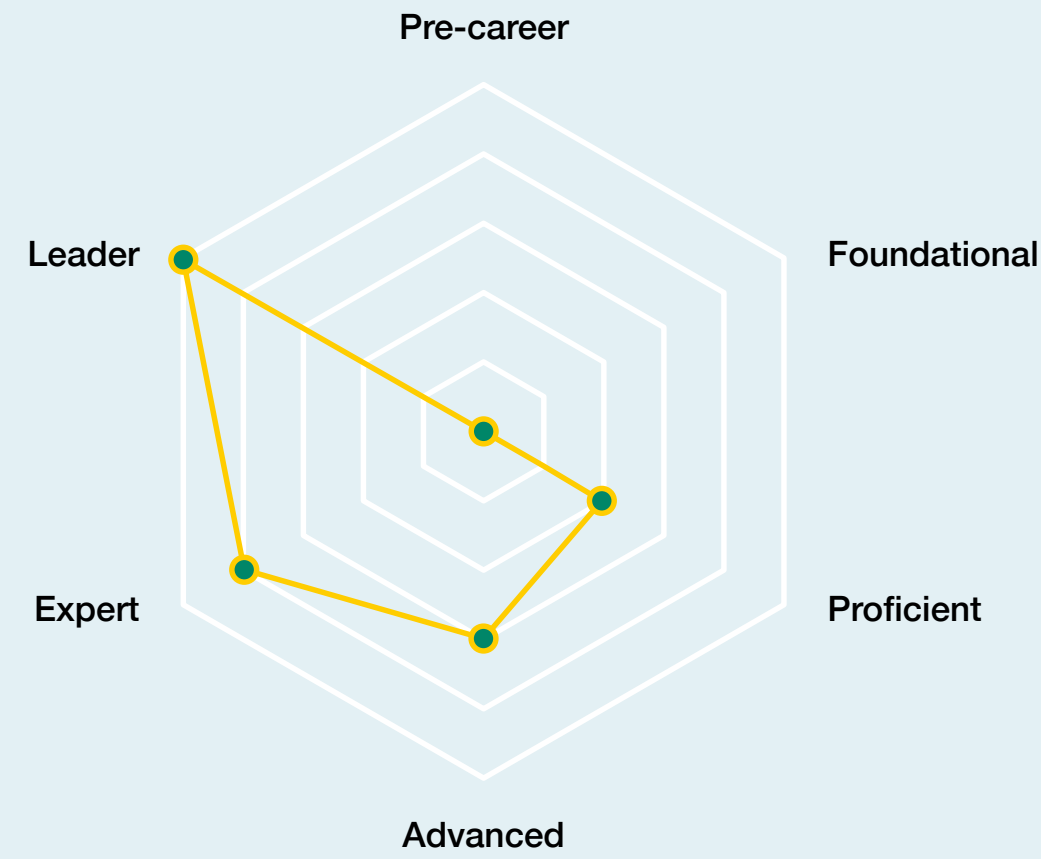
As social value professionals progress in their careers, strategic thinking becomes essential for moving from operational delivery to influencing direction, embedding social value in wider organisational strategy and driving long-term, sustainable impact.

Strategic thinking is the ability to see the bigger picture, anticipate future needs, and shape social value activity in a way that aligns with organisational goals, client priorities, and wider policy agendas. This can include:

- Delivering social value activity to align with community, organisational, client and policy priorities, including future risks, opportunities and emerging trends.

- Embedding social value into decision-making at a higher level.
- Social value that goes beyond individual activity but is delivered under one collective strategy to address longer-term outcomes and impacts.

This skill develops over time; however is common in senior social value professionals where their responsibilities shift from the delivery to strategic thinking.



Influencing Policy

Whilst the ability to influence policy usually begins mid-career onwards, policy and strategy can impact all social value professionals. This can include local and central government, clients and partners, and your own organisation.

Understanding the organisational, local, sector-level and Government policy and frameworks is a skill that develops mid-career, often due to the responsibilities of your role, ensuring compliance:

- Understand emerging procurement policy changes, and their impact on you and your organisation.
- Interpreting policy for projects and suppliers, and translating policy into practical actions for your team.

- Using your experience of social value to drive better outcomes through strategy, procurement, delivery, collaboration and engagement.

Given the constantly evolving procurement policy and social value legislation, senior career stages need to understand the impact of policy changes and act on them. As you progress in your career, you may also influence policy through consultations or working groups, advancing particular approaches or points of view, and driving the social value agenda.



Contributors

Young Professionals in Social Value (YPSV) is a global, volunteer-led network that helps **connect, create and cultivate** the next generation of social value professionals. YPSV brings together early and mid career practitioners to share knowledge, build confidence and support clearer, more accessible career pathways across the sector.

AECOM is a global infrastructure consulting firm with a strong commitment to embedding social value into projects, organisations and communities. AECOM hosted the workshops and helped drive the development of this work, providing support on a voluntary basis to help advance the social value sector.

A big thank you to the AECOM team, **Kieran Ronnie and Ella Dickinson**, for their leadership, collaboration and support throughout the process, and to **Dr Emma Langman Maher** for expertly facilitating the event and guiding discussions. Also a thank you to **Nathan Brown** for designing this document.

We are a collective, and we would also like to thank the individuals who took the time to attend the event and generously share their views and lived experiences. While we were unfortunately not able to capture everyone’s name, we are grateful to *Lucy Batten, Jamie Pimblett, Ruby Garrigan, Hannah Williams, Kathryn Brown, Abigail Isherwood, Lolita Wattle, Natasha Tate, Stevie Collins, Eve Ashby, Anna Randall, Lisa Moizer, Jennie Ashall, Katie Tilyard, Zara Harris, Molly Deakin, Emma Chapman, Ella Dickinson, Shani Wilson, Africa Sprigg, Joe Latham, Georgia Harris, Chris Couser, Mimi Pham, Louise Zeniou, Alison Ball, Michelle Levi, Penny Anderson, Kieran Ronnie, Shazad Ahmad, Hannah Shepherd, Laura Perry and Olivia Sutcliffe* for their openness, honesty and contribution to this work.

We hope this work sparks continued dialogue and lasting, positive change for social value professionals.

If you would like to continue the conversation, please get in-touch:

infoypsv@gmail.com

ella.dickinson@aecom.com

kieran.ronnie@aecom.com



Designed by





Designed by

