

Designing Social Value Around the Practical and Contractual Realities of Facilities Management

2 months ago



Facilities management (FM) teams play a central role in organisational CSR (corporate social responsibility) and ESG (environmental, social, and governance) strategies. Across the public and private sectors, FM teams are expected to demonstrate how they help local communities – not only to support their organisations but also to honour social value contractual commitments.

This shift is positive, but for many FM providers and in-house estates teams, the practical challenge is the same: how do you ensure colleagues across dispersed, shift-based, and operationally pressured environments can take part and make a meaningful difference?

FM's workforce structure makes this more complex than it may appear on paper, especially for those who spend their days in plant rooms, on rounds, or supporting critical front-of-house operations. If social value is to be impactful and credible, it must be designed around the working realities of all teams – and within the parameters of contractual commitments, which often specify the type, timing or measurement of social value activity agreed at bid stage.

In this article Steve Butterworth, CEO of [Neighbourly](#), a tech-for-good platform that connects businesses with local good causes to deliver measurable social and environmental impact, tells us more.

A workforce defined by operational pressure

Few sectors have a workforce as diverse in role and rhythm as FM. Contract structures differ, client needs

vary, and teams often work across multiple buildings or estates. Alongside this sits head office, where, in larger organisations, procurement, HR, finance, mobilisation teams, account directors, senior operations managers, and ESG professionals typically work more predictable hours with regular access to reporting systems.

By contrast, onsite teams work in environments defined by unpredictability, from shift changes and reactive workloads to lone working and navigating tight service requirements. Many have no corporate email, limited mobile access during shifts, and little protected time. These differences are not logistical quirks; they fundamentally shape how FM colleagues can participate practically in social value programmes.

In dispersed estates, the result is often a social value participation model where head office drives most activity while onsite teams – who are closest to local communities and best understand their needs – find themselves unintentionally excluded. This not only limits impact; it can undermine credibility with clients who expect social value to flow through the whole workforce, not just a central team, while aligning with the commitments set out in the bid response that led to winning the contract in the first place.

Employee-led giving

Perhaps one of the most effective ways to bridge this gap is through employee-led financial giving programmes, where colleagues can nominate local charities or community groups to receive grant funding.

Of course, for FM providers working under public sector or outcome-driven contracts, colleague nominations must sit within the commitments made during tendering. Many contracts set parameters around eligible themes, priority groups or outcome types, so the design of nomination schemes needs to complement – not compete with – those obligations. When done well, employee-led giving can then support contracted outcomes by directing support to locally relevant causes that align with what the provider has already pledged to deliver.

But more broadly, these programmes work precisely because they reflect the operational realities of FM work. A cleaner finishing a night shift, a security officer on a break, or an engineer between callouts can nominate a local cause in minutes, without needing to navigate app sign-ins, extended form-filling, or shift rearrangements. Crucially, it gives decision-making power to the people who understand the area best.

In FM, where teams work in the very communities clients aim to serve, this local focus is particularly powerful. Whether supporting a food project near a housing estate, a youth group next to a school campus, or an environmental initiative in a neighbourhood surrounding a corporate HQ, colleague-led grants help build trust between FM providers, clients, and their local communities.

It also helps meet the expectations increasingly built into procurement frameworks – and in some cases even legislation. Many public sector contracts now require the measurement of auditable, locally delivered social value. Employee-nominated funding provides both the activity and the reporting discipline required, with tangible outcomes that help providers strengthen bid submissions, evidence delivery, and maintain compliance throughout the contract lifecycle.

This approach aligns well with procurement frameworks – providing the supported activity reflects the

themes and indicators agreed at contract award. Open nomination schemes may need light-touch guardrails to ensure that colleague-selected causes still contribute to the contracted outcomes FM providers must evidence.

Low-friction fundraising and meaningful micro-support

Alongside grants, colleague-led fundraising can work well in FM environments. Small fundraising challenges, site-level collections, or team-driven campaigns offer accessible ways to participate without complex logistics. The activities are usually simple, visible, and rooted in the place colleagues work, hence fostering a sense of collective ownership and pride.

Equally important are micro-actions that cost little but hold community significance, whether that's supporting a neighbourhood volunteer-run charity, helping resource a local environmental project, or connecting a site's surplus items or food to nearby community groups.

Volunteering as a valuable component

Volunteering can also play a meaningful role in FM social value delivery, particularly when the work aligns with FM skillsets – such as engineers assisting with community repairs, catering teams supporting meal services, or grounds teams helping with outdoor projects. Some contracts actually specify particular volunteering outputs or beneficiary groups, meaning FM teams need opportunities that reflect both operational realities and contractual commitments.

However, volunteering must be positioned realistically. For many onsite colleagues, shift patterns, working arrangements, and workload intensity can make volunteering difficult to schedule. Relying on volunteering alone unfairly disadvantages the teams that often have the least flexibility.

Volunteering should therefore complement, rather than define, FM's social value delivery ambitions going into 2026. Paired with locally-anchored financial giving, colleague-nominated support, and practical micro-initiatives, these approaches provide a strong foundation for real impact.

A contractual necessity

With greater scrutiny on organisations' social and environmental impact, clients now expect transparent, evidence-based reporting, and FM providers simply cannot afford to rely on anecdotal descriptions of social value. Clear, real-time data on where funds have gone, which colleagues have participated, what outcomes have been achieved, and how initiatives align with contractual commitments is paramount.

This level of visibility helps FM leaders demonstrate value to clients, align delivery with frameworks such as the Social Value Model and the Procurement Act, and ensure local contributions are captured accurately. That clarity is especially important where social value is contractually binding. Providers must ensure routes for colleague participation remain aligned to the measures, themes and beneficiary groups specified in the bid response. This doesn't diminish the value of employee insight; it ensures it can be channelled in ways that strengthen contractual delivery rather than sit alongside it.

What's more, strong measurement can also boost internal engagement; when colleagues can see the real-world impact of their actions – such as meals funded, families supported, and projects strengthened,

participation often increases.

Designing social value around onsite as the key to scale

The bottom line is that FM teams already play an essential role in shaping the experience of the places they maintain. When organisations design community investment strategies and social value programmes that recognise, and respect, the operational realities of those teams, and ensure frameworks make clear how colleague activity leads to contracted outcomes, the results are not only more inclusive but more credible, more measurable, and more firmly grounded in community need.

In a sector defined by service, reliability, and strong local presence, social value should feel like a natural extension of the work FM colleagues already do every day. The task now is to ensure they have clear, accessible, and locally anchored routes into contributing, no matter the site, the shift, or the role.