

Corporate Social Responsibility for the Construction Industry

What is CSR?

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is more commonly understood in the construction industry as good community relations. CSR is about how a company runs their business with an awareness of its local area social and environmental needs and its impact on these. This can be as simple as involvement in your local community, getting your company seen in a more positive light, being seen as a good and safe employer, and building better relationships with your business partners, suppliers and customers.

Many construction companies are already doing CSR as part of the daily work but not recognising it as such. CSR includes good practice in the workplace and good employee relations, the marketplace with customers and suppliers through to human rights, safety standards, your impact on the local community and on the environment.

Why do CSR?

There are many CSR advantages, with a number of construction companies benefiting from the link between good social/environmental performance and improved financial performance. Being socially responsible means looking at your values and ensuring that they reflect **fairness, transparency, inclusiveness, diversity, integrity, responsiveness** and **accountability**.

According to Constructing Excellence, the benefits gained from CSR activities, such as looking after your workforce and investing in people, are **Respect** from staff and potential staff in the community, being able to **Recruit** good staff and **Retain** them.



In the construction industry, the reputation of businesses and the quality of work is often under scrutiny from environmental pressure groups, the media and the public as well as potential clients and investors. Having a competitive edge is crucial to the survival of any construction firm. The concept of CSR provides an opportunity for companies of all sizes to demonstrate industry leadership.

“Those companies that start the CSR journey today will be much better placed with the construction market of tomorrow.”

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What can you do?

Below are a few ideas of CSR activities and their business benefits:

	CSR ACTIVITIES	BUSINESS BENEFITS
WORKPLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer work experience & site visits ● Offer apprenticeships ● Mentoring ● Staff training and development – provide good working conditions and good staff facilities (toilets etc) ● Pay people on time ● A good health and safety record – secure scaffolding, records and reports of incidents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ More committed work force ✓ Staff take pride in, and learn from, training young people ✓ Increased productivity due to higher staff morale ✓ Seen as good employer and able to attract quality employees ✓ Increased staff/contractor retention and quality ✓ Reduce risk of legal action and costs
MARKETPLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High standards – complete on time, to budget, quality ● Good appearance and behaviour of staff ● Reliability ● Customer recommendations and good track record ● Award contracts and work fairly ● Link CSR activity to customers' CSR activity ● Check-a-trade and Trademarks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enhanced reputation ✓ Competitive edge ✓ Win public-sector contracts ✓ Win new business ✓ Meet customers' contractual agreements and obligations (eg number of work placements) ✓ Compliance with tender criteria and planning agreements
COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer work experience placements ● Offer site visits ● Contribute to educational activities ● Offer apprenticeships ● Support young people – 'first footing' ● Mentoring ● Manage sub-contractor behaviour – eg. Equal opportunities and no tolerance of sexist or racist comments ● Sponsorship /support of local community groups ● Donations – helping community and local causes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Seen as employer of choice ✓ Attract good potential workforce ✓ Free PR in local press ✓ Good reputation in the local community – goodwill ✓ Better links with local authorities – less scrutiny and delay in planning ✓ Good image in the community – dispel possible grievances
ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Donation of resources, excess materials to local training providers ● Recycle scrap materials (reducing landfill) ● Use recycled materials ● Use renewable energy ● Off-set carbon footprint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Compliance with tender criteria and planning agreements ✓ Reduced costs of landfill ✓ Good reputation in the local community

How to do CSR?

To write a CSR statement and an action plan with the CSR activities you want to do:

- 1 Talk to all the groups and individuals connected to your business. This could include employees and sub-contractors, suppliers, investors, customers, local community or pressure groups. What are your strong and weak points, successes and failures with regards to community relations activity? How do people see your firm? Why do people like working for your firm?
- 2 Talk to customers and suppliers about their community activities – how can you support them?

- 3 Get ideas from employees on community activities so that they feel a part of it.
- 4 Make a list of community activities you could do based on resources and time available.
- 5 Find and talk to a local training provider, school or college partner about what you can offer. Set targets (realistic) and tell employees, suppliers and people connected to the business so they understand and support.
- 6 Be proud and shout about your achievements. Post your CSR statement on your company website and display it in your office. Also, send out your CSR statement with tenders and quotes and encourage your suppliers to support you.