

**Business
of Design
Pro Bono
Work**

New Approaches for Lasting Impact

While pro bono work provides unquestionable value to all stakeholders involved, it also faces certain limitations. By definition, pro bono means giving away professional services without charge for the common good. The problem is that, while it addresses a need, it doesn't necessarily help solve the problem that gave rise to the need in the first place.

"Pro bono work—it's a means to an end, and not an end in itself," Peterson suggests. He notes that the 1+ arm of Public Architecture, which connects nonprofits to architecture and design services, has a "higher mission to engage the design community with a deeper social agenda. So, the pro bono platform of 1+ is really just a tool to move the profession towards engaging in larger social issues through engaging with the social sector."

Likewise, Garrett Jacobs, executive director of Open Architecture Collaborative, suggests traditional pro bono work doesn't always go far enough in its impact on communities. He says much of pro bono work "doesn't actually address any root causes of the issue of what's going on or build really long-term, lasting relationships. I think it can, and I'm sure it does in some instances, but that's not the focus," he indicates.

Through pro bono planning and design services, ISG has provided more than five years of support to Feeding Our Communities Partners in North Mankato, Minnesota. In keeping with Public Architecture's 1+ program, ISG has pledged 500 annual hours of service. (Image: Dean Riggott)

On the other hand, Open Architecture Collaborative's model is centered around community engagement, building relationships, identifying needs, and then helping to secure funding for the architectural services provided in the end. "The focus of our work is just to find new ways of delivering architectural services, starting with the needs of community members and then finding ways to fund the services we deliver as professionals," he says. "You have to be ahead of the need."

To do that, Jacobs says designers need to participate in community organizing and building first, and then figure out how to fund the design services that will address the larger social issues facing a community. Because, in the end, a designer's or architect's greatest asset isn't necessarily their ability to do drafting or filing permits. "One of the most important things is that you have humility and an awareness of who you are, and then use your creative practice to help find solutions to challenges. That is really your biggest benefit," he concludes. ●



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A total of \$278,649 in pro bono design services and material donations went into Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center, a Designs for Dignity project in Skokie, Illinois. (Image: Jill Buckner Photography)

Organizations Making a Difference



All design work is impactful, but nonprofit organizations and design firms that offer pro bono services, or endeavor to find funding for needed projects, in many ways are ambassadors for the profession to underserved populations, many of which have never been exposed to the positive impact architectural and design services can provide. Following are a few organizations that are making an impact on communities across North America.

Designs for Dignity

Designs for Dignity was founded on the belief that every individual should have access to environments that support the wellness of the human spirit. The organization harnesses the combined power of pro bono design and construction talent and donated materials to breathe new life into existing nonprofit spaces, giving them the platform from which they can better serve individuals in their focus mission.

Since its founding in 2000, Designs for Dignity has logged more than 90,000 pro bono hours, valuing roughly \$12 million in design services. Through its vendor partners, it also has collected more than \$10 million in donated products that have been redeployed in the community through its various projects.

For more information, visit www.designs4dignity.org.

Public Architecture's 1+

1+ is the flagship program of Public Architecture, a nonprofit with a mission to provide the network and knowledge necessary to use design as a tool for social gain. 1+ connects nonprofits with pro bono architecture and design services, and remains the first and largest pro bono service network within the architecture and design professions. The program is the conduit through which more than \$58 million of design services are pledged annually.

1+ challenges the design community worldwide to dedicate 1 percent or more of working hours to pro bono service, a commitment that equates to 20 hours per year per participating employee. Its matching portal allows nonprofits in need of design services to post their projects and provides firms a venue to find potential pro bono projects. Firms also are encouraged to find projects within their own communities and document their work on the 1+ website.

For more information, visit www.theoneplus.org/content/faq-designers.

Open Architecture Collaborative

The Open Architecture Collaborative is a global learning network with 22 chapters in 11 countries. Its goal is to mobilize architects and designers with technical skills to build community capacity and serve as an intermediary between professional practitioners and systemically marginalized communities. The nonprofit also helps other nonprofits access capital, engage with their constituencies, and maximize the use of their space, with chapters providing free services and saving groups thousands of dollars.

Currently, Open Architecture Collaborative is recruiting for its pilot training program called Pathways to Equity, a design leadership experience for social equity in collaboration with the Association for Community Design. The program aims to build public interest design knowledge through interactive workshops and hands-on field experience. This program is grounded in the values of inclusion, access, co-creation, equity, diversity, justice, and reciprocity.

For more information, visit www.openarchcollab.org and www.pathwaystoequity.org.

FIT's Integrated Service-Learning Project

The Fashion Institute of Technology's Integrated Service-Learning Project (ISLP) is an expansion of the Interior Design Relief Project, which was founded in 2013 to serve the families in Long Beach, New York, devastated by Superstorm Sandy. The mission of ISLP is to expand the interior design academic fabric to include experiential learning and to foster appreciation for lifelong learning through impactful civic and social engagement in and with marginalized communities. Each client-organization served by ISLP provides unique opportunities for informed design interventions, based on on-site visits and understanding that a well-designed space will help improve the human experience.

Notable projects include addressing space planning, privacy, and acoustics for Restore NYC, an organization dedicated to releasing people from sexual slavery and exploitation; a renovation of St. Paul's House that serves marginalized children and adults; and a laundry room renovation of the Bowery Mission Women's Center.

For more information, visit www.fitnyc.edu/interior-design/service-learning/index.php.