

I Am a Volunteer and I Do...

Peter Graham



What activities have you undertaken as part of your volunteering?

Most of my volunteering has pivoted from my involvement in the INCOSE UK Energy Systems Interest Group which I currently chair. Activities have included organising and chairing the panel session we held during COP26 'A systems approach to the energy transition for net zero', contributing content to the forthcoming 5th edition Systems Engineering Handbook, and contributing to INCOSE UK Z-guide 'An introduction to systems approaches for SMEs' (Z14). I also supported the 2021 INCOSE EMEA Workshop by presenting the energy system context .

I'm also a STEM ambassador although I'm ashamed to say I haven't found nearly enough time to bring Systems Engineering to our future STEM leaders. New working group anyone...?

What Originally inspired you to volunteer for INCOSE UK?

It took me some time to work out that "career" and "work" are not the same thing. They form separate parts of what we refer to as work-life balance, but they are different. In the career context, it's important to do a variety of things and to put yourself into new and sometimes challenging situations which can be highly rewarding. I found myself seeking out new challenges, yet I could not satisfy this need through my day-to-day work. Volunteering enables that sense of freedom to break from the constraints of traditional working for a living. Having realised this, it was easy to choose an area I was passionate about which is increasing the systemic thinking and Systems Engineering rigor for socio-environmental change across the UK (and possibly beyond). INCOSE UK provide a platform to do exactly that, and they do so through an open and inclusive organisation who rely on volunteer effort. It seemed a perfect fit!

What do you feel you get out of your volunteering?

If we measure level of satisfaction per unit time, then volunteering always delivers a high return on investment. I find people are highly motivated and collaborative in a volunteering environment and that sense of progress and togetherness is a powerful combination.

Do you have any advice or feedback to offer anyone who is considering volunteering?

People will always be receptive of whatever contribution you can make when volunteering so it's a low risk, high reward engagement. Having said that, one of the few risks that exist when volunteering is saying you'll do something but then not finding the time to do it. Try to donate your time wisely because it's easy to over-commit. Pick something that puts yourself a little out of your comfort zone so that volunteering plays its part in career progression and the sense of personal satisfaction if those are included in your goals. Ideally, choose a volunteering activity that has maximum impact and outreach so consider these measures when weighing up your volunteering options.