

THE VOLUNTEERING ACTUARY

by Maambo Mujala

As quoted by the Casualty Actuarial Society (CAS), volunteers are the lifeblood of a number of organizations.¹ There are numerous advantages of volunteering your time and efforts, whether it is within your workplace, school, professional organizations or personal activities. Some of these advantages are listed below:

- Expanding your abilities, leadership skills, technical expertise, collaboration and communication skills
- Building your network
- Contributing to the growth and development of the profession
- Gaining continuing education

Maambo Mujala had the honor of inviting John Robinson, FSA, MAAA, FCA, and Troy Milbrandt, FSA, MAAA, to share their views on volunteering.

John Robinson, FSA, FCA, MAAA, is chief actuary at Capital Region BOCES in Albany, NY, where he provides actuarial services to 130 New York school districts. This follows 23 years in the life insurance industry, twenty of which were spent at Nationwide Financial in Columbus, OH.

John currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Society of Actuaries, the Actuaries without Borders (AWB) Committee and two committees of the American Academy of Actuaries. He served for four years as president of the International Association of Black Actuaries (IABA). In addition, he volunteers regularly as an exam grader for the Society of Actuaries.

Troy Milbrandt, FSA, MAAA, is a senior actuarial director at Cigna. He is a husband and father of three currently living in Granby, CT.

MAAMBO: Why is volunteering important to you?

JOHN: Volunteering is important to me because it provides me opportunities to

- help grow the actuarial profession, both here and abroad;
- exercise my leadership skills for the good of my organizations; and
- expand my professional network.

TROY: I feel strongly that volunteering plays a crucial role within a community. It's more than just lending a hand to those who are less fortunate or who have had a devastating event in their lives. It's more than joining with others in the community to enhance common areas or complete community projects/services. There is a significant benefit to the bonds that are formed within a community through working together to achieve a common goal. The time and effort spent lifts up the entire community, not just those immediately impacted by the work.

MAAMBO: Do you volunteer in both an actuarial and non-actuarial capacity? What activities have you been involved in?

JOHN: All of my current volunteer commitments involve the actuarial profession.

- I serve on the Board of Directors of the Society of Actuaries;
- I serve on the leadership team of Actuaries Without Borders;
- I serve on two committees of the American Academy of Actuaries; and
- I grade SOA Fellowship exams as often as I can.

TROY: All of my volunteer work has been outside of the actuarial profession although it frequently has involved my co-workers. Over the years I have been involved in a number of initiatives that the community service team here at Cigna has initiated. This includes both large organizational initiatives, United Way or March of Dimes, as well as local community initiatives. The latter volunteer work involved very hands on experiences that I've used as both a way to give back to the community, but also as a team building experience for my teams. I've also tried to be very involved in my local community through participating in my children's activities, school functions, or school Parent Teach Organization (PTO) initiatives.

MAAMBO: How has volunteering helped your professional (career) life and personal life? What skills have you learned from it?

JOHN: Volunteering has provided me an extensive network of professionals, both here and abroad. This network has paid off in many ways, as examples:

- It was critical in getting me elected to the SOA Board;
- For the 2008 Olympics, my wife and I were hosted by an actuary in Beijing who is in my network, at no cost to

us (she subsequently voted for me for the Board);

- Connecting with actuaries in South Africa led to the first Diversity Conference in Cape Town in 2010, an event which brought international recognition to the International Association of Black Actuaries (IABA). The second Diversity Conference will be held in a few weeks, in Washington DC.

On the personal side, I host a Robinson Family Reunion every three years. I used my family reunion planning skills when I led the IABA's Annual Meeting Planning Committee from 2006 to 2009..

The most valuable skill I have acquired is to get my followers to say "yes" when I ask them to do something. It is usually a direct result of showing them that I care about the matter by taking the time to make a personal call. I believe this skill is imperative for all volunteer leaders; using an e-blast to solicit volunteers is too impersonal.

TROY: For me, volunteer work has provided a solid reality check to what really matters in life. It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day priorities and lose sight of the world around us. Specifically setting aside time to make a commitment to volunteer enables me personally to slow down and maintain an appropriate perspective on life. I have found as well that I enjoy the ability to see more directly the impact of my efforts. This is a rewarding compliment to working in a profession with fairly limited opportunities to see clearly the impact we have on our customers' day-to-day lives.

I have gained multiple lessons from my volunteer work. Primarily I would point to the social interaction of witnessing firsthand how others persevere through less than optimal circumstances. It's easy in life to take a glass half empty perspective, but significantly harder once you've seen what a glass looks like when it's empty. I find that these experiences enable me to have a more level headed approach to solving issues at work and at home. I've gained additional patience enabling me to be a better listener and in the end a more effective father, husband and manager.

I have found volunteer work as an excellent team building exercise. Providing an atmosphere outside of the grind of our daily responsibilities to work together as a team and accomplish something that is tangible and immediate enables valuable bonding that carries over into the office. It's difficult to carve out a day for the entire team to participate, but well worth the time out of the office.

MAAMBO: What advice would you give future actuaries about volunteering?

JOHN: Volunteering can be a great source of enrichment in your life. You should only volunteer for causes about which you are passionate. At a minimum, every fellow should volunteer sometime to participate in the exam process, because he/she could never have become a Fellow without the volunteers who run our SOA and CAS actuarial education systems.

TROY: The advice is really simple and while certainly applicable to those in the actuarial profession it really applies to all. Take the opportunities that come your way to volunteer your time, means, or effort to those who are less fortunate than you or for the greater good. Seek out ways to get involved instead of watching from the sideline or assuming someone else will be there to fill the gaps. You will be rewarded through the unique experiences of interacting with those involved or simply educating yourself on the unique circumstances of those you help. We learn best in life from the time we are infants

by getting involved and experiencing life. That doesn't change as we get older and in fact can be more critical as we relearn what we thought we knew.

Consider donating your valuable time and getting in something that you would enjoy and benefit from volunteering. Try different opportunities to find which one is the best fit for you and the organization with which are involved.

If you would like to get involved in the actuarial profession, suggested SOA/CAS opportunities are listed below:

- Writing for publications²
- Joining an actuarial working group^{1,3}
- Preparing professional development material⁴
- Governance⁵
- Volunteering on a professional interest section committee⁶
- Grading exams and question writing⁷

References:

1. CASACT.org/community/volunteer
2. SOA.org/News-and-Publications/Publications/publication-opportunities
3. SOA.org/files/soa/about-volunteer-benefit
4. SOA.org/Professional-Development/Event-Calendar/Policies-Procedures/presenter-resources
5. SOA.org/Leadership/Governance/gov-governance-detail
6. SOA.org/professional-interests/professional-interests/professional-interests
7. CASACT.org/community/volunteer

Maambo Mujala, ASA, is an actuarial graduate from the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, MB, Canada. She can be reached at maambo.mujala@gmail.com.