


# The Best Part of a Cake is the Frosting; How to Choose Service Obligations that Enhance Your Career

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Scientists are like bakers. Although a great baker will work hard and put all their effort to make an amazing cake, it would remain incomplete and less attractive without frosting. The same could be applied to your career in biomedical research. But what is the perfect ratio of frosting for showcasing your cake?



A prolific scientific career is not all about the science. Although you must invest countless hours to diversify your expertise, make yourself attractive for future employers and collaborators, and progress throughout your journey as a scientist, there are many skills which are essential for becoming a successful independent researcher that you cannot learn in the lab. In many institutions, including scientists holding a tenure-track position in the United States, there are requirements above scholarly activity such as teaching and service components. To this end, as careers evolve and expand, many scientists take on additional service and leadership roles within their institution as well as in national and international societies. These roles help strengthen skills such as the subtle art of personnel negotiation, leadership and delegation, financial management, institutional organization, as well as administrative tasks competency. These skills represent the frosting on your career – but what is the right balance and how do you acquire and develop them?

Involvement in committees or organizations within your community, institution, or the scientific community certainly provide opportunities to learn those skills. However, every hour spent on a project, STEM outreach, a committee, a working group, a meeting etc., is an hour that you cannot use for something else. Therefore, you have to choose carefully which one of these organizations or committees will give you the biggest return on your time investment and personal satisfaction. This is probably the most critical aspect to consider when you decide to invest your time in out-of-the-lab voluntary activities.

The other crucial criteria to consider carefully when getting involved into voluntary activities is diversification. You must think about the skills that would facilitate your professional journey and propel your career in the long term. Are you good with managing a budget, or better at dealing with employees and colleagues? Are you able to multitask? Do you need to improve your leadership and delegation skills? To develop these great assets, you must carefully assess which organizations or committees might help you improve and diversify your set of skills. Examples of common institutional service activities include serving on the admissions committee, regulatory or outreach committee, or in an administrative position. National and International service could include being a grant or manuscript reviewer, serving as a chair/co-chair for scientific sessions at a meeting or serving on a standing committee or as a meeting organizer. These roles can provide a lot of networking and colleague interactions as well as learning about the inner workings of your institution, how study sections/journals/societies are run as well as meeting structure, budgeting, interaction with businesses and providers, marketing and advertising. Although any of these can provide an enriching experience, any voluntary involvement comes with a cost: time! A smart way to address this issue is to evaluate the amount of free time that you dispose for voluntary activities, what the general time requirement will be, and if the time requirement will change throughout the year. By doing this, you will avoid putting your eggs in too many baskets, which would ultimately lead to under achievement, disappointment, and exhaustion as well as not being excited about the service you chose to be involved in. We all have limitations

when it comes to our time and what achievements can occur over a set period, but as you acquire more crucial management skills through voluntary activities and improve your efficiency at using your free time, this allows you to get involved in organizations and committees and be successful at them.

In closing, the goals of any service activity are not only to be beneficial for your career, but also to provide additional skills and personal satisfaction. Thus, carefully choosing the voluntary activities that you want to be involved in will provide personal and professional enhancement and compose the perfect frosting for completing your career cake!

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