Is Government Board Service for You? Consider These 4 Key Benefits

Career Development

From women, to scientists, to millennials (and professionals who are all three!), more and more diverse groups are getting involved in government. Although not everyone is eager to run for office, there is another way to get involved that is less intensive, but just as important: government board service.

No matter what field or career stage you are in, you will find opportunities to serve on international, federal, state, county, and local boards, as well as task forces and commissions. These boards, task forces, and commissions generally serve one or more of the following three key functions: managing, advisory, and regulatory. Sometimes, they hear appeals, provide expertise, advocate, receive public concerns, or establish, review, and enforce policies and regulations.

While these organizations vary in size and complexity, they are generally designed to help shape and influence critical government decisions and services. As a result, board and commission members must have experience, dedication, and commitment to service.

Could government board service be right for you? Of course, your primary reasons to serve on a government board, task force, or commission should be interested in the subject matter, a desire to serve, and eagerness to influence policy and practices in the right direction. However, there are other benefits worth considering.

Increased professional visibility

Government service often garners public visibility. Government board positions may also provide recognition for outstanding performance on the job. For example, it is not unusual for an individual's positive media or public record to be reflected in the various boards, task forces, and commissions

they are asked to serve. These opportunities may be key factors for attracting job, leadership, corporate board service, and numerous other opportunities.

Learn new substantive skills

Many boards, task forces, and commissions touch substantive areas of law, business, and community. For example, if you serve on a transportation-related board, you will most likely learn a lot about vehicles, public transportation, related regulations, and community reactions to various proposals. Government board service offers new ways to learn and establish expertise that may be instrumental to leadership opportunities and board positions in related fields. Moreover, boards, task forces, and commissions present great opportunities to network with professionals in the field, which again may be helpful with future leadership and board opportunities.

Increased responsibilities, including leadership, budget, and management skills

Overseeing these agencies and projects can provide opportunities for growth and responsibility that are greater or different in scope than those available in your “day job.” Many local, state, national, and international legislative bodies, commissions, and cabinet posts oversee projects and agencies of significant size in terms of budget, personnel, influence, and constituency. Therefore, serving on a government board can give you the opportunity to exercise significant leadership, manage multiple-dollar budgets, and oversee more personnel. With obvious advantages, increased responsibilities in public experience could be valuable in your future career goals. Government board service is an excellent way to prepare yourself for leadership or board service.

Build a reputation of integrity and ethics

Although members of government boards, task forces, and commissions are not responsible to shareholders, they are accountable to those put them in power — either through appointments or the ballot box. This sensitivity and accountability is important training for future career and board opportunities. Professionals who serve on government boards, task forces, and commissions must constantly demonstrate their judgment, ethics, trustworthiness, credibility, and value. These are also important considerations for leadership and corporate board of directors candidates.

Overall, you should not seek a position on a government board, task force, or commission if you are not truly passionate about helping your community or substantive subject area that it covers. Because these opportunities affect the public, it is important to ensure that you are prepared for the extensive time and energy commitment. However, if you are certain that you can effectively serve your community through government board service, considering these four key benefits can help you choose the opportunity that is right for you.

Olga V. Mack

Fellow

CodeX

Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat, Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities. She is working on her next books: Visual IQ for Lawyers (ABA 2024), The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle (Globe Law and Business 2024), and Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data (Globe Law and Business 2024).