



Aboriginal Participation on Boards Register

The Department of Planning and Community Development would like to thank and acknowledge the Wathaurung people for allowing the use of the word Wayaperri (meaning 'to meet') for the name of this initiative.

Help Sheet 4

What's in it for me? Ups and downs of Board service?

Before you join a Board, it is important that you are aware of what you are signing up for. Most Board members will tell you that the personal benefits and rewards outweigh the sacrifices – at least, they will most of the time. But there will no doubt be some frustrations along the way. The purpose of this Help Sheet is not to put you off Board service, but rather to ensure you go into it with your eyes opened to the realities as widely as possible.

The Ups

Making a difference

There can be few more satisfying experiences than being able to see your goals and vision – and when the vision of the Board and the community you serve come to fruition. Contributing to the achievement of something you really believe in brings a form of satisfaction that is unlikely to be equalled in other arenas.

Exercising power

Joining a Board offers an opportunity not just to influence decisions, but to make them (in consultation with other Board members, of course). In such a way, Board members can have real power over the way public organisations, property, facilities, programs and projects are managed and the directions in which they are taken.

Gaining new knowledge

Becoming involved in Government Boards can help you to gain a keener appreciation of how the public sector operates, as well as current governance standards and issues. This is knowledge that can often be put to good use in other aspects of your personal and professional life.

Gaining new skills

Successfully negotiating the challenges and responsibilities of Government Board service – overseeing finances, fulfilling legal responsibilities and reporting to the Government, to name just a few – can lead to a whole new set of very useful skills, which will most likely be of use in other areas of your life. Meeting and working alongside other talented Board members can also lead to a valuable expansion of skills.

Expanding your networks

Making connections through the development of relationships and friendships with other Board members can have long-lasting and highly positive personal and professional implications.

Getting to know your own worth

In the day-to-day grind of your work and personal life, it may be easy to lose sight of what skills and expertise you actually have to offer the world. Joining a Board and contributing to its success can lead to a more finely tuned understanding of your own worth – and a realisation that what you have to say is just as important as the contributions from anyone else.



Finding it's not just about the bottom line

Many Government and other not-for-profit Board members find their service unleashes a passion and a commitment that is unlikely to be found among the search for shareholder returns in a company Boardroom. The motivation to achieve a mission on behalf of the community at large can be very stimulating.

Being inspired

Most people know the buzz that can come from being part of an effective team. Working with like-minded, dedicated people, who are all working towards the same goal, is another experience opened up to Government Board members. That passion, commitment and spirit of generosity can be difficult to find in other arenas.

Meeting new people

Whether you are working to provide advice to the Government, to oversee a professional body or to manage a community asset, serving on a Board can put you in contact with people you may not have otherwise encountered. Getting to know your Board's stakeholders can help you to gain a range of new insights and perspectives that can be useful not just for your work with this Board, but in other areas of your life.

The Downs

No matter how great or inspiring your Board is, there are bound to be some hiccups along the way. Below we have outlined some of the general challenges that all Board members may encounter at some stage during their term.

Running against the clock

Many Government Board members are volunteers squeezing their Board duties in between myriad other work and family commitments. Coping with time constraints – both your own and those of people you are relying on to help get the job done – can present a real challenge for Board members.

Assessing effectiveness

Board members are usually motivated by a sense of altruism, a desire to contribute to the public good and a belief in the Board's mission – motivations that are often quite different to those of members serving on commercial Boards. However, when profits are not the last word in success, it can be difficult to measure exactly how your Board is performing – and this can be frustrating or confusing for some Board members. Of course, even in the absence of profit-making as a motivation, Board members must still keep a close eye on turnover, budgets and risk-management, and this can be a challenge in itself.

Another one bites the dust

In Boards, membership is in a constant state of flux. While some change in composition is healthy for a Board, having to regularly organise replacements, update new members and adapt to a constantly changing Board culture can be frustrating.

Lack of motivation

To be effective, Board members must operate as a team. While keeping yourself motivated and focused can sometimes be a challenge, there can be even greater challenges in having to cope with an occasional lack of motivation among colleagues.

Let's get serious

Some Government Board members can mistakenly equate limited or no pay with minimal responsibility, leading to hesitancy in making decisions that will affect the long-term future of the organisation or facility they are overseeing. Many struggle to resist the urge to be too soft or optimistic, when a hard-nosed, reality-based decision is actually what is required. This can impede the effectiveness of the Board and can be frustrating for its members.

Personality clash

Boards are composed of people and people have personalities – some of them challenging. The sometimes frustrating realities of human interaction do not stop when you enter a Board meeting; indeed, they are often amplified by it.

Meeting fatigue

Meetings are meant to be inspiring, orderly and efficient, but the opposite is also sometimes true. Long-winded, circular or irrelevant discussions should never be on the agenda but nonetheless can creep into Board meetings at times.

For more help sheets visit the following website and follow the links to Wayaperri:

<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/indigenous/>

Queries should be directed to wayaperri@dpcd.vic.gov.au