

Boards & Commissions: Opportunities to Serve

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There are many opportunities for Wisconsinites to serve our great state through the various boards, commissions, and councils. Here is how you can apply.

MADISON - "I'm retired and I want to stay that way," the gentleman told our Senate Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism Committee. "But I am looking for opportunities to give back to our state."

This gentleman was one of many who crossed my path over the past twelve years. His nomination to a council came before our committee prior to confirmation by the full Senate.

Wisconsin is a state of many opportunities for citizens to serve in appointed boards, councils and commissions. These positions are mostly volunteer, although some offer reimbursement for related expenses. This type of service provides citizens the opportunity to share their experience and expertise in a statewide leadership role.

The gentleman I quoted was nominated by the Governor to serve on the Snowmobile Recreation Council. He and his family had a long history of participating in local snowmobile

recreation. He wanted to share not just his wealth of knowledge, but also his incredible passion and dedication to making Wisconsin's snowmobiling the best in the country.



The Snowmobiling Recreation Council is just one of over 180 different boards, commissions and councils on which Wisconsinites may serve. Understanding these various service opportunities is an exercise in understanding state government itself.

The 2015-16 State of Wisconsin Blue Book provides a detailed overview of the state government's structure. The state has 17 departments. Each department, from Administration to Veterans Affairs, is headed by a secretary appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. Citizens serve on boards, commissions or councils to provide guidance to many of these departments. For example, eleven people make up the Board of Veterans Affairs.

State government also includes ten independent executive branch agencies. These entities include the University of Wisconsin and the Technical College Systems, the Public Service Commission (which oversees utility regulation) and the Commissioner of Insurance. Most of these agencies are directed by citizen-controlled part-time boards and commissions.

Most boards and commissions have requirements potential candidates must meet, ranging from professional experience to geography. For example, at least five members of the 15-member Snowmobile Recreational Council must be from the state's northern region.

Licensure and regulation of many occupations is overseen by an associated state board. These board members, from architects to veterinarians, are professionals who give their own time to ensure professional quality, which helps protect Wisconsin citizens. Several professional boards include public members. For example, the Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Counselling and Social Work Examining Board includes three public members in its 13-member Board.

Authorities are an odd creation of the State Legislature that are intended to be both financially self-sufficient and an organization of the state. The UW Hospitals and Clinics Authority is

perhaps the most well-known example of a state authority. This Authority operates the UW Hospitals and Clinics, including the American Family Children's Hospital. The authority is composed of a 16-member board, six of whom are citizens appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate.

Another example is the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. It is not a corporation – despite its name – but a state authority. However, WEDC is not at all self-sufficient, instead relying almost entirely on funding from the state budget.

While most Senators take seriously their role of confirming the governor's appointees, the Senate Majority Leader failed to bring some 150 gubernatorial appointments to the Senate for confirmation this year. The Senate Leader was quoted saying he may bring these appointments forward for a full Senate vote in a possible Extraordinary Session before year's end. No word yet on when this session may take place or what else may be a part of the calendar.



Over my tenure in the State Senate, I am often asked, “how will you fix our state’s problems?” No one single person can address the breadth of issues and details needed to resolve the challenges facing Wisconsin. The wisdom we need is found in the genius of the people of our state.

If you are interested in serving the following website provides information about and application for the various boards, commissions and councils: <https://walker.wi.gov/apply-to-serve> . As we transition to Governor Evers’ Administration, the website will change.

Wise leaders before us created the boards, commissions and councils that play a very integral role in carrying out the people’s business. Consider how you might give back to our great state by sharing your time, talents and wisdom.

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