



*by Melody Nall, Engagement Director, Blueprint Kentucky*

# MAKE a DIFFERENCE through BOARD or COMMISSION SERVICE

Becoming an engaged citizen in your local community can take many forms: a community member can begin by serving on a local board or commission that does not require an election and after volunteering or serving on a board, a citizen may choose to run for elected office (city or county commission, school board, or other elected positions). Local board or commission service is a way to provide valuable input on public policies related to local issues, city or county growth, and on a personal level, gain knowledge and experience in how public policy is created and monitored. In addition, it is a great opportunity for networking with individuals that have similar interests and to create meaningful personal connections.

## WHY SERVE ON A LOCAL BOARD OR COMMISSION?

**SHAPE PUBLIC POLICIES AND DECISIONS** Boards and commissions play a crucial role in shaping public policies at the local level. They review, analyze, and advise on issues that impact the community, from zoning and land use to health and education. Serving on these boards or commissions allows you to directly influence decisions that affect everyday life in your town, city, or county.

**CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR COMMUNITY** Serving on a local board or commission is a way to give back to your community. You'll have the chance to apply your skills and knowledge to real-world issues, whether that's advocating for sustainable development, improving local schools, or promoting public health initiatives. It's a direct way to make a positive impact.

**GAIN VALUABLE EXPERIENCE** Being part of a local board or commission offers valuable experience in governance, leadership, and public policy. This can be especially useful for those interested in pursuing a career in public service or expanding their professional network. The work you do can build important skills such as collaboration, communication, and problem-solving.

**MEET LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE** Boards and commissions bring together community members who share an interest in public service. This provides an opportunity to connect with people who are passionate about making a difference, building partnerships, and learning from others' perspectives.

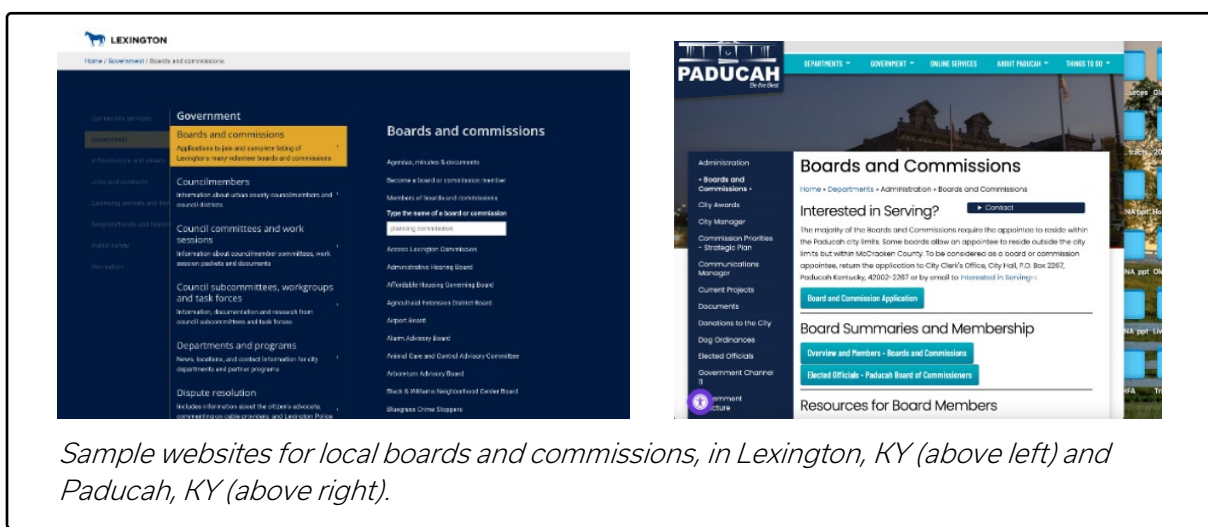
**HAVE A VOICE IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE** Local boards and commissions provide a platform for residents to have a voice in the decision-making process. By serving, you ensure that your community's needs are represented in policy discussions.

## HOW TO SERVE ON A LOCAL BOARD OR COMMISSION

**IDENTIFY THE RIGHT BOARD OR COMMISSION FOR YOU** There are various types of boards and commissions, each focusing on different aspects of the local community. Some of the most common include:

- **County Extension or Library Boards:** Identify issues and community needs, and help develop, carry out, and evaluate non-formal educational programs that contribute to individual well-being, quality of life, and the county's social and economic development.
- **Planning and Zoning Commissions:** Work on land use, development projects, and zoning laws.
- **Parks and Recreation Boards:** Oversee public recreational facilities and community programs.
- **Local Health Department and Safety Commissions:** Address public health issues, emergency preparedness, and community safety.
- **Human Services and Social Assistance Boards:** Focus on issues such as poverty, homelessness, and public assistance programs.

Research the boards and commissions available in your community to find one that matches your interests and ability. Check with your local government's website or visit your city hall or county executive office for a list of current boards (and vacancies), their responsibilities, and their meeting schedules. Attend a meeting or an event to see if the topic interests you and if you have expertise to share as a potential member.



*Sample websites for local boards and commissions, in Lexington, KY (above left) and Paducah, KY (above right).*

**MEET ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS** Each board or commission will likely have its own set of eligibility requirements. Common qualifications include being a resident of the area, being of a certain age, or having specific experience or ability in certain fields. For example, a planning commission might need knowledge of urban planning, while a local board of health might seek members with a background in public health. Review the requirements on the website or check with your local government to ensure you meet the qualifications before applying.

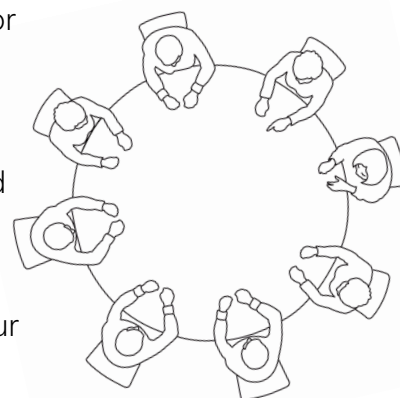
**APPLY FOR A POSITION** Once you've found a board or commission that interests you, the next step is to apply. Many, but not all, local governments have an application process that may include:

- Completing the application form detailing your qualifications and interest.
- Attending an informational session or interview.
- Submitting references or a resume.

Applications may be reviewed by a nominating committee, and appointments are often made by the local governing body, either the Mayor/City council or Judge Executive/County commission. If there is not a formal application, ask what process the county or organization follows and continue your pursuit to serve.

**UNDERSTAND THE COMMITMENT** Serving on a local board or commission usually involves regular time commitment, including monthly or quarterly meetings and possibly subcommittee work. It's important to understand the time requirements before applying, as many positions are unpaid and require a significant volunteer commitment.

Additionally, some boards may require members to attend training sessions or public hearings. Be prepared to give your time and energy to the position, balancing it with your other personal or professional obligations.



**BE AN ACTIVE AND ENGAGED MEMBER** Once appointed, it's essential to be an active participant. This means attending meetings, staying informed on key issues, and engaging in discussions. Board members often work with other local officials, staff, and residents to gather input, research topics, and propose solutions to issues facing the community. Also, be open to collaborating with fellow board members and seeking community feedback on decisions that affect residents.

**ADVOCATE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY** As a board or commission member, you have the unique opportunity to advocate for policies and initiatives that enhance your community. Continue to stay informed about local issues, engage with your neighbors, and speak up on behalf of the community's needs.

# TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Serving on a local board or commission is a meaningful way to make a difference in your community. It allows you to shape local policies, contribute to public decisions, and be a voice for the residents you represent. Whether you're passionate about education, public safety, or urban development, there's a board or commission that could benefit from your skills and perspective. Take the time to find the right fit for you and seriously consider applying to serve your community. It is an opportunity to contribute to the growth and well-being of your community while gaining valuable leadership experience.

## SOURCES

**Boards and Commissions/City of Lexington:**

<https://www.lexingtonky.gov/government/boards-commissions>

**Boards and Commissions/City of Paducah:**

<https://paducahky.gov/departments/administration/boards-and-commissions>

**The Policy Circle:**

<https://www.thepolicycircle.org/briefs/local-boards-and-commissions/>

**Kentucky County Extension Councils:**

<https://psd.ca.uky.edu/countycouncils>