



From Australian government to the boardroom: Matt Crocker on landing your first board role

Securing a board seat is a common ambition for corporate affairs (CA) leaders, but what are the practical steps to get there? And how do you balance board responsibilities with a full-time role? As a full-time CA leader and member of no less than four Sydney-based boards, Matt Crocker has more insight to offer than most.

In the first interview in our new series, Katrina Andrews, Managing Partner at Andrews Partnership, sat down with Matt to discuss his insights and advice on routes to the boardroom.

Positioning yourself for board appointments

For Matt Crocker, the journey to board roles started with a desire to give back and maintain a connection to public purpose as he transitioned out of politics. Having served as Head of Policy in the Premier's Office in New South Wales for ten years, seeking a board role became what he describes as "an active part of my consideration as I constructed a new career and went through that portfolio change."

His first board appointment, in 2020, was with the Sydney Institute of Marine Science (SIMS), which was looking for a director with government and policy expertise. Familiar with the organisation from his government work – and a longtime advocate – Matt was introduced through a mutual connection.

He encourages others to be proactive: "Make sure that you have the conversation with others who have networks or connections, so they know that you're interested."

It's amazing how much of this comes from a personal connection or a referral.”

Finding the right fit

When evaluating potential board roles, Matt recommends choosing organisations whose purpose and leadership align with your values. “Make sure that you're comfortable and supportive of both the organisation, its direction and the people involved,” he says. He currently serves on the boards of SIMS, Committee for Sydney, the Biennale of Sydney and United Way Australia, all chosen because he feels a personal passion for the work and mission.

Beyond your immediate personal network, Matt also recommends building informal networks with organisations you're interested in or passionate about. This could be through offering pro bono work or contributing to sub-boards or fundraising committees – each a potential step toward a board seat.

Building relevant experience

A first board position can open the door to others as your credibility and experience are established, but gaining board experience in your current role can also be a big benefit.



“The more that you can do to give yourself exposure to a board context, the better off you'll be,” says Matt.

“Some organisations offer board observer programs which not only give you good experience and an understanding of what the role entails, but also signal your willingness to take on those roles.”

From a practical perspective, being clear on your legal obligations and responsibilities as a board member is also important, and courses such as those offered by the Australian Institute of Company Directors can help.



The more you give, the more you'll gain.

– Matt Crocker, on board service

Board attractiveness: The CA advantage and government experience

Matt believes CA leaders are equipped with valuable skills that will help them succeed in board roles. “A lot of corporate affairs deals with human relationships,” he says.

“You're dealing with areas of grey, you're looking for abilities to compromise and solve problems while staying aligned with strategic goals. All of those skills are really relevant in a board conversation.”

He also emphasises the importance of adjusting how you apply your CA experience in a board context, where the focus shifts from execution to oversight. Rather than “rolling up your sleeves and doing things,” board roles are about setting direction, ensuring accountability and contributing to long-term strategy.



Matt's background in government helped prepare him for this distinction. As Director of Policy, he was often engaged in high-level conversations about goals, risks and outcomes, rather than day-to-day implementation. “Make sure you frame your skills through the lens of governance,” he says. It's not about stepping into the shoes of management, but guiding the organisation by contributing to strategic conversations and supporting management in achieving objectives.”

Over the last five years, boards have become more deliberate in seeking a diversity of skills, experience and opinion, says Matt, and many aspects of contemporary CA leaders' roles are sought after when it comes to board appointments. Boards are dedicating a significant amount of time to issues including trust and reputation, raising their organisation's profile, managing relationships with funders, crisis communications and policy and regulatory risk;

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all areas where CA professionals can make a valuable contribution. Experience in government relations is often sought-after, as is knowledge of cybersecurity and AI issues, which Matt describes as a current conversation in many boardrooms.

Board roles also go well beyond the traditional CA remit, requiring involvement in governance issues from HR to legal to health and safety and accounts – all areas where CA leaders should gain experience and look for ways to add meaningful value. The more you can evidence and demonstrate a broad range of skills, the more appealing you will be as a candidate,” he says. “And I think the more effective it makes you in the day job too.”

Boards and a full-time role: Getting the timing right

When is the right time to seek a board position? Don't wait until you're approaching retirement, says Matt. “There's a misconception that you transition from a full-time career into a board role, but people should consider mixing a board role with their full-time work.

Today, many organisations actively support their executives in taking up external board roles,

recognising the professional growth, strategic perspective and broader networks it can bring back into the business. Matt's experience is a strong example of this shift. In his full-time role as Head of Market Development and Corporate Affairs at public infrastructure development firm Plenary Group, he says the company is highly supportive and sees the benefit of his board involvement for both him and the organisation.

Contributing to boards supports his development, expands his network and fulfils his sense of purpose. “It fits with both the values of the organisation and the broader capability I bring to the role,” he says.

While research shows the average age of board members is 58, the share of new appointments aged under 50 rose to 14% in 2024.



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“Lots of boards are looking at board renewal and they’re looking at how to bring on younger people for diversity of experience,” says Matt. There is also a balance between experience and the ability to actively contribute when considering the right time to join a board. The time commitment shouldn’t be underestimated: “There might be a certain number of board meetings a year, but you’ll likely spend far more time than that preparing, supporting the organisation and contributing to board committees.”

There is a sweet spot when it comes to timing, says Matt: “You need to be at a point in your career where you have enough experience and breadth to contribute meaningfully, have the time available to commit and be at a stage where you can be in the role for several years.”

Board work and career benefits

For Matt, board work brings personal fulfilment and professional growth: “Ultimately, I think it makes you a more well-rounded, arguably more effective professional in the corporate affairs space, as well as offering personal fulfilment and a renewed sense of purpose.”

His advice? “Put your hand up and contribute in areas you care about – whether it’s in the not-for-profit space, with start-ups or commercial boards. The more you give, the more you’ll gain.”

For CA leaders, taking on a board role isn’t just a professional milestone – it’s a way to amplify your influence, broaden your perspective and contribute meaningfully to the future of an organisation.

The Andrews Partnership view: Why board roles matter more than ever for CA leaders

At The Andrews Partnership, we support senior corporate affairs (CA) leaders through executive search, assessment and development – and boardroom roles are becoming an increasingly important part of that journey.



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– Matt Crocker, on finding the right timing for a board role

We're seeing a rise in executive search mandates for CA leaders where a board seat is part of the role – particularly in complex or high-stakes markets like Myanmar – and we regularly act as a connector for NGOs seeking experienced, values-led board members.

As an industry, we believe CA leaders have never been better positioned to serve on boards. This is *our moment*.

The growing focus on trust, reputation, stakeholder engagement and regulatory risk means the skills CA leaders bring – communication, judgement and diplomacy – are no longer adjacent to board concerns. They're central to them.

We also see the personal benefits of board service extending beyond visibility and networking. Serving on a board builds strategic thinking, strengthens decision-making and enhances your credibility and ability to influence, particularly with the C-suite and CEO.

And the momentum is shifting. Where external board appointments once raised internal policy questions, more organisations now actively support them, recognising the professional value board work brings back into the business.

We'll continue to champion the rise of CA leaders in the boardroom – not just as trusted voices, but as experienced, strategic leaders who help steer and shape the decisions that matter most.



KATRINA ANDREWS

Managing Partner, Andrews
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Landing Your First Board Role : A Practical Guide for CA Leaders

Treat board work as part of your career strategy, not a post-retirement plan

Start early. Don't wait until you're winding down your full-time career – consider taking on a board role while still in executive leadership. It builds your network, capability, perspective and influence.

Be clear on your motivation and align with the right board

Choose organisations whose mission, leadership and direction align with your values and interests. Know *why* you want a board role – whether it's to give back, develop professionally or broaden your impact (or all three!) – and let that guide your choices.

Leverage and build your network

Tell your network you're looking for a board opportunity – referrals are often the gateway. Consider offering pro bono work, joining advisory groups or helping with fundraising to build trust and visibility with organisations you care about.

Get governance exposure before your first appointment

Look for ways to engage with board activity in your current role, such as presenting to the board, shadowing senior leaders or joining a board observer program.

Invest in your board-readiness through training

Take a governance or director course (such as through the Australian Institute of Company Directors) to build your understanding of board responsibilities, legal duties and risk management.

Reframe your CA skills through a governance lens

Highlight your experience in stakeholder management, reputation, ESG, policy and risk – key areas valued by boards. Show how you can contribute strategically, not just tactically.

Broaden your business knowledge beyond the CA remit

Strengthen your exposure to HR, legal, finance and operational risk – areas boards regularly oversee. The more breadth you can demonstrate, the more board-ready and effective you'll be.

Be realistic about the time commitment

Board work involves more than attending meetings. Be prepared for reading, prep, committee responsibilities and informal support. Ensure you have capacity and can commit for several years.

Choose where you can contribute, not just where you want to be

Focus on where you can add real value, not just prestige. Boards are looking for active contributors with leadership experience and a willingness to engage.