



MARION HAGGARTY-FRANCE

Former University Secretary
University of Alberta

Fun fact:

I love Disneyland and when I grow up, I want to be a greeter at Disneyland! Well, maybe it is more like in retirement, I really want to spend time being a volunteer at the happiest place on earth. My very first job was as a greeter at the Calgary Stampede, so I feel I would be a perfect way for me to share and spread joy!

Why have you joined GPC?

I attended an initial 'mixer/information' session about GPC in Edmonton. I had worked as a governance professional for a few years but it wasn't until the name changed to GPC that I realized that it wasn't limited to the corporate world but instead was open to all of the governance professionals serving in any sector (public or private). At the initial event I instantly recognized the importance of the group and signing up as a member to help build the inaugural Edmonton GPC Chapter.

Why do you think GPC is an important organization for any governance professional to belong to in Canada?

I strongly believe that governance professionals should belong to GPC as it is an essential resource centre on governance issues through various platforms - professional development events, the Education Program, the annual conference, newsletters and networking. For individuals new to working in a governance role, GPC provides a wealth of information on how they need to direct and manage their role. Participation in local GPC chapter events contributes to the significance of networking within the governance environment.

GPC also stays current with governance issues and presents events and discussions on key governance topics.

What do you believe is a key topic right now in the governance industry?

I believe a key topic is how the impact of a move to a virtual world has affected decision-making. There had always been a degree of virtual participation, but not to the extent that we have faced since the arrival of a global pandemic. This has changed some of our governance processes for the short-term, but what does long term look like and what does this mean for governance?

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How did you get into governance and your current role?

I had been working at the University of Alberta for about fourteen years, twelve of which had been in the Provost and Vice-President (Academic)'s office. At many universities, there are two governing bodies - academic and board. I was very familiar with the academic governing side of the house, but not as familiar with the board of governors' side. The U of A had been searching for a University Secretary (the senior governing advisor at the university) for a while, and I finally decided to put my name in the mix. The search committee had about a dozen people on it (very typical for a search like this), and thankfully, I earned the position! I spent eleven fabulous years in the role and learned a lot and it was an excellent career move for me. Sadly, in July of this year, due to significant budget cuts at the U of Alberta and in the post-secondary sector in Alberta, my position was eliminated and merged with the General Counsel.

I am so grateful for the experience I have gained as a governance professional and I have confidence that my governance experience will serve me well on my next stop!

Where do you see, or would you like to see the role of governance in the next few years?

There will be more change coming and increased expectations for how businesses, institutions respond will only increase. Governance should be at the forefront for how the various sectors respond to the change ahead. Ensuring that there is an ability for individuals and organizations to make good decisions and be responsive will be important and governance professionals can and must play a role to ensure that happens.

What is the best career advice you have received?

The best career advice I ever received was to not be afraid to ask for help when you need it. Having a network of trusted colleagues and a 'personal board' to guide my own personal and professional life has been critical for me. And never hide behind an email or text when a phone call is in order!