



Pandemic or Not, ELEC is Fulfilling Its Mission

JEFF BRINDLE | October 12, 2021, 04:08 pm | in [Edward Edwards](#)

As state government eases toward employees returning to the office five days per week, it is fitting to address how the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC) has carried out the responsibilities during the pandemic.

The past two months have seen employees gradually return to the office, two days per week in August and three days per week in September. Employees worked remotely the other days. This schedule will continue until November 29, the date the Governor has set for a full-week return to work for ELEC employees.

This approach has been taken to give staff time to rearrange their personal lives before 20 months of telework comes to an end and to allow agencies time to implement COVID-19 testing procedures.

This period of crisis has shown that government can function remotely, and for the most part, pretty well. In the case of ELEC, governmental responsibilities were carried out, perhaps not as easily, but certainly as effectively.

At the Commission, the approach taken by management was to try to keep some of the better aspects of the pre-pandemic era, such as having receptionists answer calls instead of sending callers into a maze of voicemail menus. At the same time, staff took advantage of technological innovations such as teleconferencing to adapt to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 health threat.

ELEC has always been proud of its reputation as a service agency.

The unsung heroes of the pandemic period were the people who answered the phones and directed calls to the appropriate staff. Management believed it was more important than ever for citizens to encounter live people rather than a machine when they called the agency.

It may have been more efficient for the agency to have the public leave messages on an answering machine. It would not have been in the public-spirited tradition of the Commission.

The decision by management proved correct as Cheryl Lippincott, Samantha Schutzbank, Aracelis Brown, and Tamika McCoy fulfilled their public duties by answering the phones throughout the pandemic and reassuring the public that their concerns would be addressed.

Often overlooked, yet so vital to a well-functioning organization, is the work done by clerical staff. Also bolstering the efforts of ELEC during the pandemic were Elbia Zeppetelli, Maureen Tilbury, Monica Triplin-Nelson, and Tamico Flack.

Legal, Information Technology, Compliance, and Investigative functions continued as candidates, committees, lobbyists, and public contractors reported electronically while at the same time the public was provided timely online access to those reports.

Moreover, with Information Technology staff support, virtual Commission meetings were held every month, including public hearings. Training sessions continued to be available, though virtually, by the Compliance staff with assistance from Information and Technology.

Legal and Investigative functions continued, with Legal having proposed and adopted regulations as well as litigating and resolving important cases.

As the pandemic carried over into this gubernatorial election year, the Gubernatorial Public Financing staff, under the supervision of the Compliance section, has processed public funds for qualifying candidates in both the primary and general elections and assisted with the public debates required of participating candidates.

Finally, a steady stream of analytical press releases, newsletters, white paper research reports, and columns have continued to be published to enable elected officials, the press, and the public to track emerging trends in campaign financing, lobbying, and other areas under ELEC's jurisdiction. This undertaking was of considerable importance during the hiatus in in-person government that occurred during the pandemic period.

Importantly as well, Compliance staff has continued to respond to phone calls and provide guidance to the filing community.

Before the virus arrived, ELEC and other government agencies were doing far more things online compared to ten or 15 years ago. Gone were the days when candidates and lobbyists lined up to file reports in person.

Efiling of reports, webinars, and the ability to view and download documents straight from the agency's website are among the time-saving conveniences the Commission began providing electronically years ago.

Because the Commission recognized that change is inevitable, and that technological innovations would offer new opportunities for service and progress, management knew it was important to embrace those innovations where it would improve service.

At the same time it realized that it was important to hold on to that which has historically worked well. In a nut shell, it has been the goal of the Commission's management to embrace the new but preserve the good of the past.

The experience of the past 17 months has been useful and will serve management well as staff returns and accommodations are made for future innovations and progress.

Despite the recent experience, it is hard to imagine government operating on an entirely impersonal, virtual model. Government exists to serve the public interest and it still does so best through face-to-face discussion and real person assistance as our receptionists proved during this pandemic.

Nevertheless, we are looking forward to combining the in-person service by our returning employees with improvements brought about by the age of technology to continue the Commission's tradition of exemplary service to the public.

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The opinions presented here are his own and not necessarily those of the Commission.